

Robert Elsie

The Tribes of Albania

History, Society and Culture



I.B. TAURIS

Robert Elsie is a writer, translator, interpreter and specialist in Albanian studies. He has written over seventy books on Albania including *Albanian Literature: A Short Introduction* and *A Biographical Dictionary of Albanian History* (both I.B.Tauris).

‘The tribal system of northern Albania is one of the most fascinating aspects of a very distinctive part of Europe. Over hundreds of years, when their territory was under Ottoman rule but seldom fully under Ottoman control, these tribes provided a basis for social identity, local justice and military action. So cohesive were they that the unity of a tribe could easily survive the conversion of one part of it to Islam. Anyone who studies the history of these people will encounter tribal names and tribal identities at every step; and yet, until now, there has never been a general work gathering all the scattered information about them that survives in sources of many different kinds. *The Tribes of Albania* will be an indispensable and authoritative work of reference. There are few people in the world who could have written such a work; absolutely no one could have done it as well as Robert Elsie, whose knowledge of this material is unparalleled.’

– **Sir Noel Malcolm**, Senior Research Fellow, All Souls College,
University of Oxford

‘The tribalism of the north has been of primary significance to Albania right up until modern times, yet anyone attempting to study it soon encounters daunting difficulties. The topic was taboo in the communist period, while earlier surveys and travellers’ accounts are inevitably scattered and inconsistent. Now Robert Elsie has very helpfully brought together a wealth of information, in as clear and systematic a fashion as the subject permits, to create this scholarly handbook to the northern tribes, their structures, geography and history. It is to be welcomed as a valuable contribution to the ongoing demystification of the country.’

– **Jason Tómes**, author of *King Zog: Self-Made Monarch of Albania*

THE TRIBES OF ALBANIA

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ROBERT ELSIE

I.B. TAURIS

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'If the American zonyas [ladies] wish to know what we have learned from our fathers, who learned it from their fathers and their fathers' fathers, I will speak. All these things are very old, and none of them are written in books, therefore they are true. I am an old man, and I have seen that when men go down to the cities to learn what is in the books, they come back scorning the wisdom of their fathers and remembering nothing of it, and they speak foolishly, words which do not agree with one another. But the things that a man knows because he has seen them, the things he considers while he walks on the trails and while he sits by the fires, these things are not many, but they are sound. Then when a man is lonely, he puts words to these things and the words become a song, and the song stays as it was said, in the memories of those who hear it.'

*{An old man of Shala, speaking to Rose Wilder Lane in Theth in 1921.
From the book Peaks of Shala (New York, 1923), p. 180.}*

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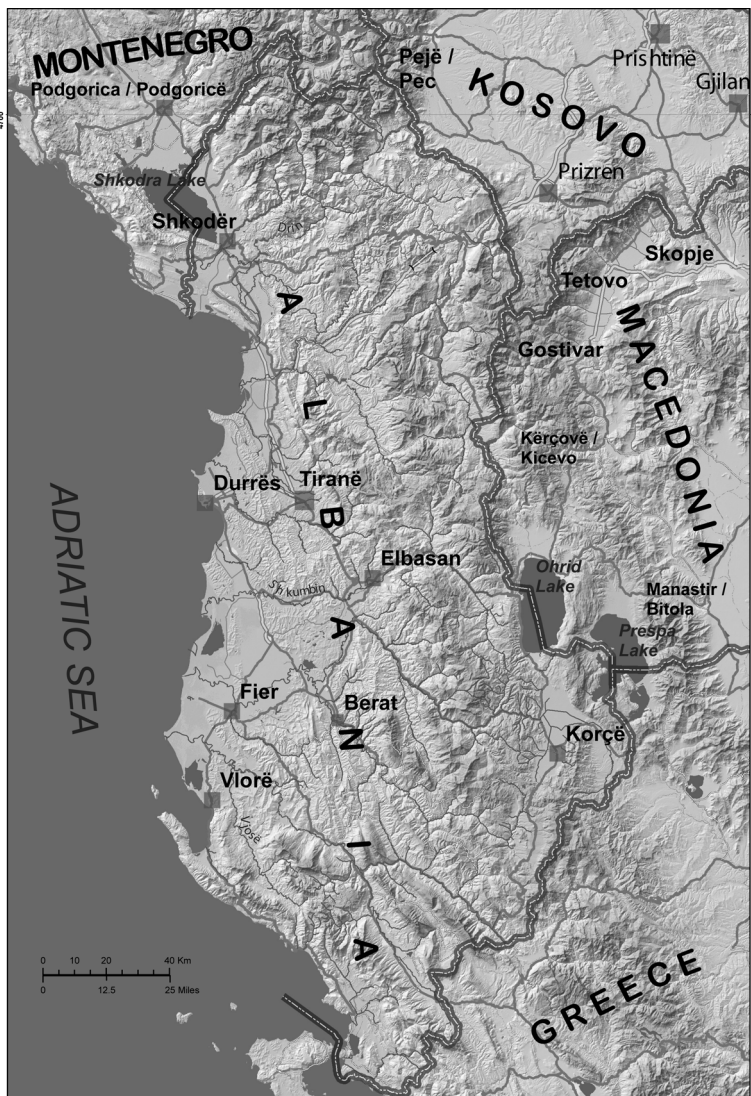
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Albania in southeastern Europe

INTRODUCTION

A tribal society in Europe? Yes, there is one, or at least there are still noticeable traces of one, in the mountains of northern Albania. This unique society and culture thrived until the early years of the twentieth century and was still largely intact when the communist regime seized power in Albania in 1944. It is regarded as the only true example of a tribal society surviving in Europe up to the mid-twentieth century.¹ Many of the structures of this traditional society were weakened or indeed eradicated in the half century of Stalinist rule in Albania (1944–90), but the north of the country still remains a very different place from more advanced south of Albania, and from the rest of the world. Why this relic, and what do we know about it?

Up to the present, there has been a glaring lack of knowledge and scholarly information about the tribes of northern Albania. This volume endeavours to fill the gap and provide basic information about all the major Albanian tribes, at least as much information as can be found in source material and as can still be gleaned from the collective memory of the people of the region. A comprehensive history of the tribes is impossible because earlier written accounts are extremely sporadic.

Who are the Albanians?

The Albanians are said to be among the oldest peoples of southeastern Europe. Their roots would seem to go back to the ancient Illyrians who inhabited the western and southwestern Balkans in the Roman period. As a people, we can trace the Albanians back to about the year

1,000 A.D. when the first written documents (Byzantine Greek and Latin records) make mention of them.

The Albanian language (*shqip*) is currently spoken by about six million people in the southwestern Balkans, primarily in the Republic of Albania and in the neighbouring countries that once formed part of the Yugoslav federation (Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro). In Albania itself, the language is spoken by the entire population of about three million individuals, including some bilingual ethnic minorities. In the Republic of Kosovo, Albanian is spoken by almost the entire population of about two million individuals, again including some bilingual ethnic minorities. The Republic of Macedonia is estimated to have at least half a million Albanian speakers, equalling about 25 per cent of the total population of that country. A minority of about 50,000 Albanian speakers is also to be found in the Republic of Montenegro, mostly along the Albanian border (the areas around Ulqin/Ulcinj, Tuz/Tuzi and Gucia/Gusinje). There are also notable old Albanian settlements in Greece and Serbia, and in southern Italy.

Ghegs and Tosks

The Albanian population is traditionally divided into two groups: the northern Albanians called Ghegs² and the southern Albanians called Tosks. The geographical division between the regions of settlement of the two groups stretches along the Shkumbin River in central Albania that flows past Elbasan, south of Tirana. The distinction between Ghegs and Tosks is primarily linguistic as they speak different, though, in general, mutually comprehensible dialects. The Gheg dialect of Albanian is spoken in all of Albania north of the Shkumbin River, as well as in Kosovo, Montenegro, southern Serbia, and in most of the western part of the Republic of Macedonia. The southern Tosk dialect is spoken in most of Albania south of the Shkumbin River and into Greece, as well as in the traditional Albanian diaspora settlements in Italy and Greece.

Curiously enough, the Albanians are not particularly fond of the terms Gheg and Tosk nowadays, which many of them feel smack of national division. Yet it is universally recognised that there are substantial differences between the northern and southern Albanians, and not only in language. There is also a notable cultural dimension to the distinction.

The north of Albania, also known as Ghegnia (Alb. *Gegnia* or *Gegëria*, land of the Ghegs) has never made life easy for its inhabitants. The mountain terrain is harsh and many remote settlements were and, to an extent, still are virtually cut off from the outside world. The population is exceptionally poor by European standards, and the living conditions have been described as primitive for many areas. The southern half of the country, also known as Toskeria (Alb. *Toskëria*, land of the Tosks), while not exactly prosperous, has always been more advanced than the north, economically, socially and culturally.

Albanian Tribal Society

In Albania and elsewhere in the southwestern Balkans (Montenegro, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) there arose a society split into tribes. Originally isolated groups of families, they evolved into self-administering clans that had a common culture, often common ancestry and shared social ties. Most of the tribes had their own specific territory and defended their land and interests against other tribes and external forces. This tribal society extended from Herzegovina in the north almost to Tirana in the south, but it crystallised most clearly in the mountains of northern Albania and in the contiguous regions of Montenegro. There were also tribal structures in southern Albania, but they were not as developed as in the north.

The Albanian tribes, it must be noted, had a broadly common culture with the Slavic (i.e. Serbian-speaking) tribes of neighbouring Montenegro since the border tribes were in close contact with one another over the centuries. Language was not always an element of division, nor in fact was religion. Some tribes are known to have changed language over time. The now Slavic-speaking Kuçi [Kuči] tribe of Montenegro, for instance, was originally Albanian-speaking. The same may be true, at least in part, of the Montenegrin Vasoviqi [Vasojevići] and Palabardhi [Bjelopavlići] tribes. On the other hand, many of the Albanian tribes took their origins from the north, i.e. from Montenegro and even from Herzegovina, and were no doubt originally Slavic-speaking.

The term tribe requires some definition from the outset because it rests upon two very different concepts in Albanian. The first concept is that of the *fis* which is usually translated as a 'tribe' or 'clan'. In the northern Albanian context, the *fis* was a patrilineal kin group, i.e. a tribe

in which all male members regarded themselves as being of common descent. In many cases, until recently, the members of such tribes could trace their origins back to one specific ancestor centuries earlier. Regarding themselves thus as all related to one another, they were exogamous, i.e. they did not marry within their tribe but usually acquired their wives from other non-related tribes. The *fis* was thus a tribe in the sense of blood relations, and did not necessarily imply a specific geographical territory.

The second concept is that of the *bajrak*, which can also be translated as a 'tribe' or 'clan'. The *bajrak* was more of a political entity, usually entailing a specific geographical territory. The term derives from the Turkish word *bayrak* 'standard, banner'. The hereditary chief of a *bajrak* was the *bajraktar* 'standard bearer' who often served as the military leader of the tribe and was responsible for its defence and external relations. There were about 150 *bajraks* in northern Albania in the early twentieth century.

Thus, a *bajrak* implies territory, whereas a *fis* implies kinship and descent. A northern Albanian tribe could, for instance, consist of one or more *bajraks* that joined forces, and a *bajrak* could contain members of more than one *fis*. It was the overlapping of the two concepts that gave rise to the specific tribes of the north, with the constructions and constellations sometimes being fluid. German-language scholars were the first to endeavour to clarify this relationship. The Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz, who hiked through the northern Albanian mountains in August 1903, noted the following:

I wish to add the following remarks on the concept of the *bajrak* since there are many erroneous views on the subject. The *bajrak* (banner) is a subdivision of a tribe (*fis*). The two terms are in a quite coincidental relationship with one another. The tribe is a complex of families who trace their origin from the same tribal ancestor. Accordingly, the basis of the *fis* is a genetic relationship, however distant it may be, and this excludes marriage within the *fis*. The *bajrak*, on the other hand, is a grouping of families living on the same territory. It is thus related to land. Unfortunately, this general definition has suffered modifications over time. For example, the Mirdita are regarded by others as a tribe. However, only three of the *bajraks* are related to one another: Oroshi, Spaçi

and Kushneni. The other two joined Mirdita later. For this reason, the first three *bajraks* do not intermarry, but get their wives from Fani and Dibrri. Secondly, according to tradition, Pulat, Shala-Shoshi, Dushmani, Toplana, Nikaj and Mërturi form the Dukagjini tribe (*fisi i gjashtë bajraqëve* – the tribe of six *bajraks*), but they do not intermarry.³

Baron Franz Nopcsa (1877–1933), a recognised expert on Albania in his day and the author of the only major study of the northern Albanian tribes, remarked:

The *bajrak* is a subdivision of many of the tribes. There are various combinations of the two concepts. A tribe can consist of one or more *bajraks*. The tribe and the *fis* can be the same. A *fis* can divide into several tribes and *bajraks*. The parts of a *fis* that break off can become part of another tribe. A tribe can be monophyletic (of single origin) or, if it consists of two or more *fis*, it can be polyphyletic (of multiple origin).⁴

In his classification of the Albanian tribes, the Austrian journalist and scholar Franz Seiner (1874–1929) noted in particular:

There is no translation of the word tribe in Albanian and it is best in Albanian to use the Turkish word *bajrak* ‘standard, banner.’ Translating the word tribe with the Albanian word *fis* is wrong because *fis* implies a blood relationship, a kin group that does not permit intermarriage. Families belonging to a *fis* all trace their origin to one common, and often distant tribal ancestor. A *bajrak* can consist of several *fis*. The *bajrak* of Shala, for instance, is composed mainly of two *fis*. [...] Usually all the members of one *bajrak* belong to the same *fis*, but sometimes a *fis* can include several *bajraks*.⁵

In this volume, we have used the word ‘tribe’ loosely so as to cover not only the *fis* and the *bajrak*, but also some ethnographic regions of northern Albania with a distinct history and identity that are not strictly tribes but are often regarded as such.⁶

When and How Did Albanian Tribal Society Arise?

Using the genealogies given to him by the various tribes and by comparing them to historical data, Baron Nopcsa established that most of the Albanian tribes traced their origins back to the 200-year period between 1450 and 1650. The earliest reference to a tribal origin, that of the Berisha, is said to date from around 1300. The names of most of the major tribes, such as the Hoti, Berisha, Kastrati, Shala, Shkreli, Shoshi, Nikaj, Mërturi, Krasniqja, Gashi, Bytyçi and Bobi, appear in documents in the fifteenth century, initially though as surnames. Nopcsa provided the following chronology of early tribe events⁷ that set the scene for the rise of the Albanian tribes. His chronology may not be entirely accurate as many of the events in question hover somewhere between history and legendry, but it can serve as a guide for dating the origins, or the perceived origins, of the tribes and of Albanian tribal society in general:

The ancestral father of the Berisha living in Berisha	around the year	1300
The ancestral father of the Kelmendi		1400
The settlement of Shala		1430
Some shepherds settle in Qelëza (Kabashi)		1450
Kelmendi occupies the region around Gucia		1460
Arrival of the Thaçi in Kodra e Thaçit		1480
Arrival of Murr Deti in Berisha		1480
Can Gabeti living in Shllaku		1480
Keq Preka, the ancestral father of the Hoti, living in Montenegro		1520
Settlement of Gruda by a refugee from Suma		1550
Mërturi settlement of Mount Straziçe		1550
Arrival of the ancestral father of the Nikaj		1550
Arrival of one of the ancestral fathers of the Kiri		1550
Arrival of the present inhabitants of Lohja		1590
Expansion of the Mërturi to Mount Shllum		1590
Expansion of the Mërturi to Brisa		1590
Dedli settles on Mount Veleçik		1590
The Thaçi settle in their present territory		1620
Expansion of the Dushmani into the Vila region		1620

Expansion of the Shala from Theth	1620
Expansion of the Mërturi towards Raja	1650
Expansion of the Shoshi to Prekal	1650
Withdrawal of the Gashi eastwards	1660

What gave rise to the Albanian tribes as autonomous political and social units? The political history of Albania in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries provides a backdrop that may offer some explanations.

In the fourteenth century, northern Albania was at the crossroads between three great realms: Serbia, Venice and Turkey. From 1343 to 1355 the region was under the rule of the Serbian King Stefan Dushan (ca. 1308–55) of the mighty Nemanja dynasty, who reigned from his capital in Skopje. However, native Slavic and Albanian families were also vying for power in the region. Notable among them were the Balsha [Bašić], a dynasty of Slavic origin that ruled over Zeta (Montenegro) and most of northern Albania after the fall of the Nemanja dynasty, from about 1360 to 1421. To the south of Balsha land was the territory of the Thopia family. From 1359 to 1388, Charles Thopia (d. 1388) held sway in a triangle of land between Durrës, Kruja and Elbasan, and called himself prince of Albania (*princeps Albaniae*). Other native families strove for power, too. Among them were the Dukagjinis, whose homeland was between Lezha and the Fan River, the Zacharias of Dagno [Deja], the Jonimas of the Lezha and Durrës region, the Spanos of Drisht, the Gropas of Dibra and Ohrid, and the Pulatis of Pulat/Pult. In the final years of the fourteenth century, the coast of Albania then came under the domination of the Republic of Venice as part of so-called Venetian Albania (Ital. *Albania Veneta*). The Venetians were primarily interested in trade and in the control of the Adriatic rather than in territorial expansion inland. As such, they did not venture far from their forts and trading posts on the coast. They took Durrës in 1392 and Shkodra in 1396, but did not occupy the interior. At any rate, they did not keep the Albanian coastline for long.

The expansion of the Ottoman Turks into the Balkans in the second half of the fourteenth century gradually swept all of the traditional states and native ruling families from power. Victorious at the famed Battle of Kosovo in 1389, the Turks took Shkodra in 1393 and overran Kruja in 1415. After the conquest, they founded the Ottoman Sanjak of

Albania (Turk. *Sancak-i-Arnavid*) to stake their definitive claim and to incorporate the region into their growing empire. The once ruling Albanian families were forced to submit to the Turks or to withdraw into the mountains.

The situation of these local dynasties became fluid for a time during the revolt of George Castriotta (1405–68), known as Scanderbeg, the scion of a notable family from Dibra. Scanderbeg instigated a revolt against the Turks in November 1443 and, in March of the following year, he convened an assembly of all the important families of northern Albania in Lezha [Alessio], during which it was decided to set up a standing army to counter an impending Turkish invasion. Scanderbeg was selected to head this force of about 15,000 men. A large Turkish army soon flooded into Albania but was beaten back in Dibra at the end of June 1444. Two further Ottoman invasions were repelled, one in October 1445 and a second one in September 1446. In May 1450, Sultan Murad II arrived personally at Kruja and besieged the fortress for four and a half months. Although overwhelmingly outnumbered, the native rebels managed to resist Turkish forces and conferred a humiliating defeat upon him. However, the alliance of Albanian families which Scanderbeg had endeavoured to cement in Lezha in March 1444 began to break up. The Dukagjini, Arianiti and Balsha families withdrew their support and even Scanderbeg's commander Moisi Golemi and Scanderbeg's nephew Hamza abandoned him. In 1466, Sultan Mehmed II himself arrived in Albania with a large army, and laid siege to Kruja. After two months, he was nonetheless forced to return to Turkey and left his troops under the command of Balaban Pasha. In July 1467, Mehmet II returned to Albania, this time with an even larger force, determined to bring the rebel Scanderbeg to his knees. To counter the sultan, the Albanian leader called for a new assembly of nobles in Lezha in January 1468. On 17 January 1468, however, before the assembly could convene, the heroic Scanderbeg died, and resistance to the Turks and the sultan soon collapsed. Albania was to return to Ottoman rule for another four and a half centuries.

The Turks had established an Ottoman sanjak administration in Albania, but they did not settle there in any great numbers during the centuries of their rule. They confined their occupation to the appointment of local governors and to the secondment of troops who were usually held up in fortresses. With their help, taxes and conscripts

were demanded of the native population. From the start, these obligations caused turmoil and led to defiance and on many occasions to open resistance.

The local ruling families had been thrown out of power and dispersed, but no form of real governance penetrated the mountainous interior of the country to replace them. The surviving population was more or less left to its own devices – every family for itself.

It was no doubt within this context that the tribal system arose, with related families banding together and expanding to form larger units of self-defence. However, it is probably only in the eighteenth century (or the second half of the seventeenth century at the earliest) that we can speak of consolidated tribes with a clear identity and/or territory – at least the possession of unchallenged grazing land – as we encounter them in unequivocal documentation from the nineteenth century onwards.

The harsh topography of the northern Albanian mountains certainly played a major role in the rise of the tribal society, too. Travel and communication over the high mountain passes were arduous such that each valley was virtually independent. No power ever managed to subdue the region. Indeed, so isolated and inaccessible were the northern Albanian mountains that not even at its zenith was the Ottoman Empire able to gain full control over its Albanian subjects there.

The mountains of northern Albania were thus long without real political governance, but they were not without laws. The mountain tribes developed their own customary laws, put together in a code traditionally known as the *kanun*. This code of laws that was adapted to local conditions and needs, and was very detailed and specific, regulated virtually every aspect of life in the mountains and was strictly adhered to. Even today it is largely respected, despite the presence and force of ‘government laws’. The best known variants of this code were the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini* that was observed among the tribes north of the Drin River; the *Kanun of Scanderbeg*, also known as the *Kanun of Arbëria*, that was observed among the tribes south of the Drin, including Mirdita; and the *Kanun of Dibra* in the eastern Dibra region.

Rightly or wrongly, these codes have been linked to a phenomenon that has drawn much international attention in recent years – Albanian blood-feuding (*gjakmarrije*). Whether the *kanuns* were responsible for

institutionalising revenge and promoting the widespread vendettas that caused the extinction of a good portion of the male population a century ago, or whether they simply reflected an already existing tribal mentality, is open to debate. Few of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century foreign travellers to the northern mountains failed to notice this phenomenon – a ‘society at war with itself’. Much has been written since that time about the *kanun* and about the chilling ramifications of the never-ending blood feuds such that these topics, spectacular though they may be, will be treated only peripherally here.

How Many Tribes Were There?

It is difficult to answer this question with precision because it depends to what extent and for how long certain population groups defined themselves as tribes and were recognised as such by neighbouring groups. Tribal identity was not an entirely clear-cut matter since tribes could merge or divide over time. Some were exterminated or otherwise died out. Of certain tribes, like the Matagushi, Bukëmira, Juli, Lapi and Bythodosi in Malësia e Madhe, the Mavriqi and Gzhoba in Shala, and the Fanmadhi in Mirdita, we have only the names. According to legend, the Gzhoba died out because they betrayed and killed a guest under their protection. Other tribes established themselves over time and survived as tribal units well into the twentieth century. There were large tribes (*fisi i madh*) and small tribes (*fisi i vogël*), the former having more than 100 households.

Franz Seiner, who carried out the first thorough census of Albania on behalf of the Austro-Hungarian occupation authorities in 1916–18, counted and classified 65 Albanian tribes, of which he also produced an admirable map.⁸ Of Seiner’s 65 tribes, 19 had less than 1,000 members, 21 had between 1,000 and 2,000 members, 12 had between 2,000 and 3,000 members, six had between 3,000 and 4,000 members, and two had between 4,000 and 5,000 members. The largest tribe he included was Zymbi (Luma) with 11,140 members.

In this volume, we provide information on about 70 northern Albanian tribes, each of which having had a clear and specific identity at one time or another. As the reader will see from the table of contents, the tribes in question have been assembled into larger groups based on general ethnographical and geographical criteria.

Do the Albanian Tribes Still Exist?

Albania has gone through major demographic changes in recent years and most tribal regions of the north, where life was hard and living standards modest, to say the least, have now been largely depopulated. The population has moved *en masse* to the coastal cities of Shkodra, Tirana and Durrës, or gone abroad in the hope of finding a better life. Since the fall of the communist dictatorship in 1990 and, in particular, since the momentary collapse of the Albanian state in 1997, the tribes have been scattered.

Nonetheless, both those who have remained in the north and those who left their native tribal lands retain a clear awareness of their tribal identity. It is not uncommon to hear someone nowadays say, for instance: 'I am Shkreli, but my wife is Shala.' Someone else may note in passing: 'We are Kabashi' or 'Our family is Mërturi.' More accurate would perhaps be to say: 'We were Kabashi [...] Our family was Mërturi,' but sentiments and the quest for identity run deep. This being said, for most Albanians from the northern mountains, tribal identity nowadays involves little more than an awareness of the origin of their families. In this sense, it may be no different than the identity of someone born in North America who knows that he or she is of Italian, Swedish or Korean origin.

This Book

The purpose of this volume is to assemble information about the northern Albanian tribes, in particular by gathering what could be gathered before the collective memory of the tribes fades and vanishes into the annals of time. A short chapter has thus been provided for each of the identified tribes which typically includes information on its geographical location, on the earliest historical references to it, on its religious affiliations over time, and on population statistics. A second part of each chapter aims to provide information, where available, on tribal legendry and ancestry, in particular for the monophyletic tribes, as well as notes – certainly not complete – on the history of the tribe in question. This is often followed by a section containing travel impressions, i.e. texts by nineteenth and early twentieth-century travellers and explorers from abroad who ventured into the northern Albanian mountains and recorded what they saw. The chapters conclude, in

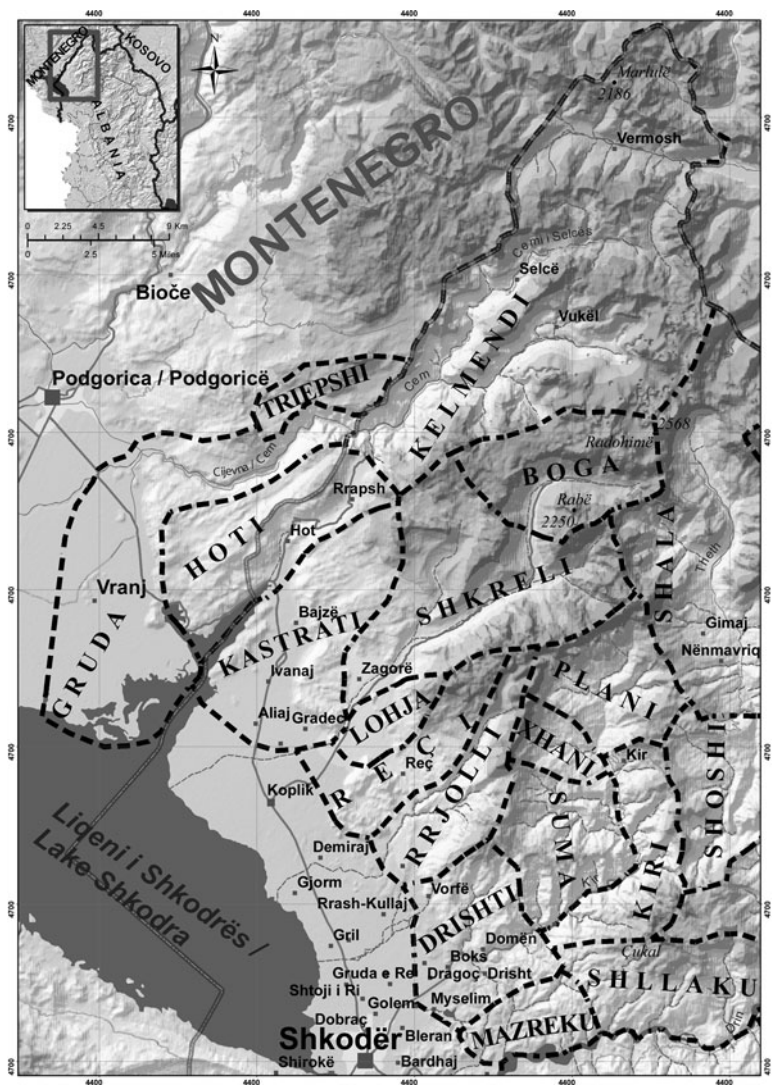
many cases, with a brief presentation of noted historical representatives of the tribes. The main corpus of the book is then followed by information on a number of minor tribes (some are classed here as minor simply for a lack of extensive information and not necessarily for reasons of size or prestige), as well as a glossary and bibliography to assist the interested reader in pursuing further research.

The Tribes of Albania is, admittedly, a motley collection of information and texts with many lacunae of which the author is painfully aware. Nonetheless, it is to be hoped that this presentation will stimulate further interest in this very particular, indeed unique, European society and in Albanian history and culture in general.

Robert Elsie
Berlin, April 2015

EDITORIAL NOTE

Albanian nouns and place names often cause confusion for international readers because they can be written with or without the postpositive definite article, e.g. Tirana vs Tiranë and Elbasani vs Elbasan. In line with recommended international usage for Albanian toponyms, feminine place names appear here in the definite form and masculine place names appear here in the indefinite form, thus: Tirana, Vlora, Prishtina and Shkodra rather than Tiranë, Vlorë, Prishtinë and Shkodër; and Elbasan, Durrës and Prizren rather than Elbasani, Durrësi and Prizreni. One great exception to the rule has been made here for tribal designations and regions, because the English-language forms of many of them, such as Hoti, Kelmendi and Shkreli, are better known in this definite form. In this volume, we have therefore written all tribal designations in the definite form. For example, the first aforementioned tribe will be called Hoti, but the main village in that tribal territory is called Hot. Secondly, place names in and around Albania have often changed with time, and only recently has there been a generally accepted orthography for many of them. In earlier texts quoted in this book we have on many occasions thus added the modern forms or alternative forms in square brackets to assist the reader.



The tribal regions of the Northern Albanian Alps

CHAPTER 1

THE TRIBES OF THE NORTHERN ALBANIAN ALPS (*MALËSIA E MADHE*)

The Kelmendi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Kelmendi tribal region is situated in the present District of Malësia e Madhe in the most northerly and isolated portion of Albania. The core of this region is the upper valley of the Cem (Cijevna) River. Kelmendi borders on the traditional tribal regions of Gruda and Triepshi to the west, Hoti to the southwest, Boga to the south, Shala to the east and on Slavic-speaking tribes to the north. The administrative centre of this region, which consists mostly of canyons and deep valleys, is now the village of Vermosh. The main settlements of Kelmendi include: Vermosh, Tamara, Selca, Lëpusha, Vukël and Nikç.

Population

The name Kelmendi was first recorded in an Ottoman tax register in 1497 as *Kelmente*¹ and as *nahiye Kelmenta* (district of Kelmendi).² The Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi (1611–85), who journeyed through northern Albania in 1662, referred on numerous occasions to the infidel tribe of *Klemente* or *Kelmendi*. The ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari recorded the form *Clementi* in 1671, as did the map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli in 1688 and the map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola in 1689. The term



Ein Klementiner, und eine
Klementinerinn.

Stich aus »Ungarisches Magazin« II. 1782.

Figure 1.1 A Kelmendi man and woman (copperplate etching by Jacob Adam of Vienna, 1782)

Kelmendi, with its early variants Klmenti, Klmeni, Klimenti and Clementi, was at any rate known in western Europe in the seventeenth century. Kelmendi, which is also a common family name, in particular in Kosovo, is commonly said to be related to the Latin personal name *Clementus* or to Saint Clement, borrowed into Albanian through the influence of the Catholic Church, but it is likely that the tribal

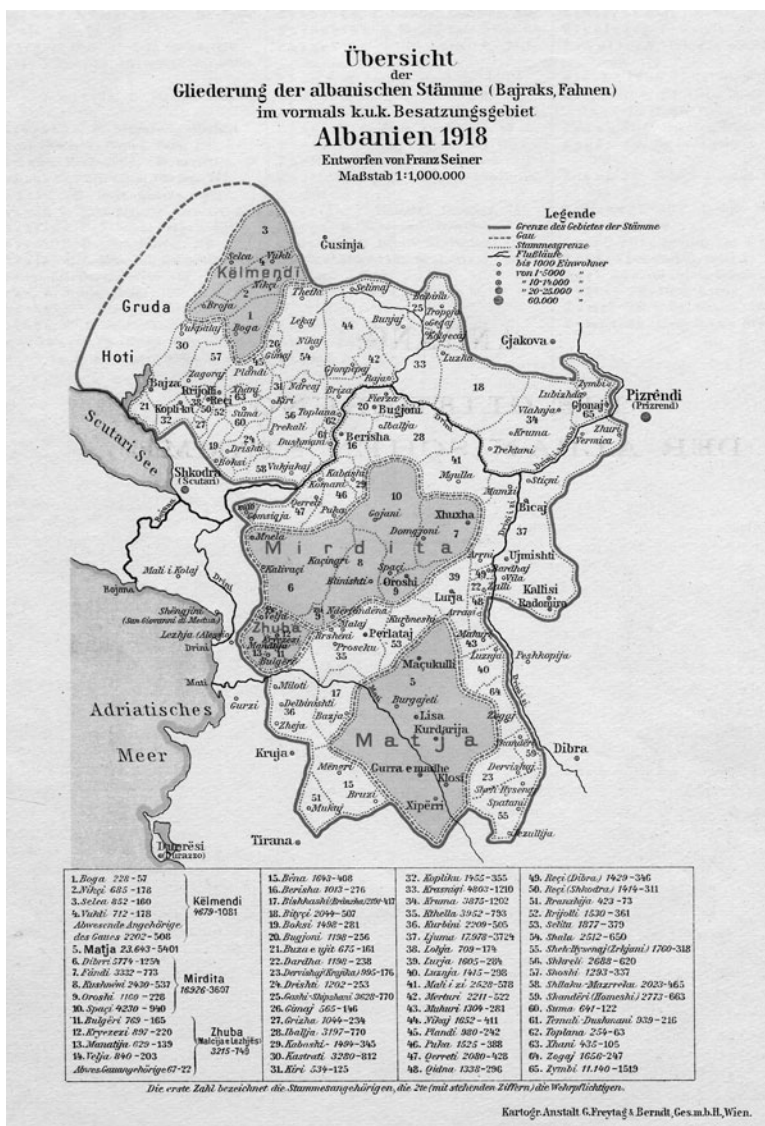


Figure 1.2 Idriz Lohja and his family, of the Lohja tribe

designation is earlier than the association with Saint Clement. There was, at any rate, a church of Saint Clement in Vukël that was built by the Franciscans in 1651.³

In 1614, the Kelmendi tribe is reported by the Venetian writer Marino Bolizza to have consisted of 178 households and 650 men in arms, commanded by Smail Prentasseu and Pedda Sucha.⁴ He describes them as an untiring, valourous and extremely rapacious people. In a report to the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in 1634, Gjergj Bardhi (Giorgio Bianchi), the Bishop of Sappa, informs us that the Kelmendi consisted of 300 houses and 3,200 inhabitants.

In 1838, the Austro-Hungarian physician Joseph Müller was informed by a Pater Deda of Vukël that there were 4,200 inhabitants in Kelmendi.⁵ At about the same time (1841), in his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains', Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gave the population of Kelmendi as 2,000, of whom 500 were men in arms.⁶ In 1866, Emile



Wiet, the French consul in Shkodra, noted 510 households comprising a total of 3,263 people.⁷ In the late nineteenth century, we can thus estimate the population of the Kelmendi tribe at some 4,000.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Kelmendi tribe were given as follows: 779 households with a total of 4,679 inhabitants. This comprised the *bajraks* of Nikç, Vukël, Selca and Boga, and the settlements of Nikç, Broja, Vukël, Selca, Vermosh, Kolaj and Preçaj.⁸

The Kelmendi were and are a Catholic tribe, although a small minority converted to Islam in the Turkish period. The parish of Selca was founded in 1737 when the first births and deaths were recorded.⁹ Their patron saint is the Virgin Mary, called Our Lady of Kelmendi (*Zoja e Kelmendit*), whose feast day is celebrated on 24 May.

The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported:

On 24 September 1671, we left the land of Hotti and reached Clementi [Kelmendi]. There is a church here dedicated to Saint Clement. It is situated in a place called Speia di Clementi. The church was built by the people of Clementi in 1651, when the reverend Patres Reformati entered the country. Father Leone of Cittadella and Brother Angelo of Milan were serving here. It is done in whitewash without mortar, and covered in planks. It was well looked after and is furnished with holy vestments. But the Eucharist is not held here, although there is no danger from the Turks, as there are no such individuals in this place.

Clementi has a number of villages: Morichi with 6 homes and 40 souls, Genovich with 7 homes and 60 souls, Lesovich with 15 homes and 120 souls, Melossi with 7 homes and 40 souls, Vucli [Vukël] with 32 homes and 200 souls, Rvesti with 6 homes and 30 souls, Zecca with 7 homes and 40 souls, Selza di Clementi [Selca], together with Morichi has 34 homes and 290 souls, and Rabiena and Radenina with 60 homes and 400 souls. All of these villages use the church of Saint Clement in Speia. They go there to attend mass and receive the holy sacraments, and when they die, they are buried in this church.

The plateau of Clementi and the plateau of Nixi [Nikç] and Roiochi have 112 homes and 660 souls. It is a good 12 miles to Clementi. The Patres Reformati come here two or three times a month to celebrate mass and assist the people in their spiritual needs. There is a need here for vestments because it is very difficult for them to be transported here from Clementi every time. They call it the plateau of Clementi because the Clementi tribe constantly harassed the inhabitants of this area and took over their land. The plateau is fertile and the people of Clementi can make a living off it.¹⁰

The Kelmendi were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and were divided into three *bajraks* (Selca, Vukël and Nikç) and later, around 1897, with the addition of Boga, into four *bajraks*. The Boga were actually a separate tribe living to the south of the Kelmendi region, on the other side of a high mountain range, and had closer contacts with Shkreli and Shala, but they turned to the Kelmendi for protection and gradually became affiliated with them.

At least from the mid-nineteenth century, like many of the northern tribes, the Kelmendi drove their herds down to the coast every autumn where they spent the winter months. They shared pastureland with the Shkreli and Rrjollri tribes on Mali i Rrencit. Edith Durham described the trek of the Kelmendi of Selca as follows:

Each autumn the tribesmen migrate with great herds of goats, cattle, and sheep to seek winter pasture on the plains near Alessio [Lezha], where the tribe owns land, the women carrying their children and their scant chattels upon their backs; and toil back again in summer to the pastures of the high mountains, a long four days' march with the weary beasts.¹¹

Baron Nopcsa, who was in the northern mountains at about the same time as Durham, noted this phenomenon, too:

Among the transhumant shepherds that are common throughout the Balkans are the Kelmendi, as well as the Hoti, Kastrati, Boga and Shkreli. For the sake of their herds they are forced to have two

homes: winter quarters on the plains and summer quarters up in the mountain pastures. According to Hecquard, these mountain tribes have been spending the winter on the broad plains of the Boyana, Drin and Mat Rivers along the Adriatic since 1847. It must, however, be noted that not all of the tribesmen change residence, only those who do not have suitable winter pastureland in their own territory. Of the Kelmendi, it is probably more than a third of them who move. In early September, the various families begin the trek down to the plains of Shkodra and Lezha. Their movements can be traced from the Montenegrin border near Gucia [Gusinje] right down to the lofty fortress of Kruja, a distance of 140 kilometres as the crow flies. Everywhere one looks on the otherwise monotonous plain of Shkodra one can see the shepherds and their flocks, including some quite interesting and picturesque groups. Whenever there is a lack of fodder in the mountains, the members of other tribes, too, such as the Shala and even the Rugova highlanders from the region of Peja [Ipek] move down to the Adriatic coast. In the winter of 1908, I encountered Rugova tribesmen and their herds in the region around Durrës. Although it is rather difficult to calculate just how many people wander as nomads each year in search of winter fodder, I would think there are at least 4,000 to 5,000 of them. I rely in this calculation on the estimation that of the 5,000 tribesmen of Kelmendi, almost half of them take part in the trek and that their exodus is increased substantially by the other, though smaller tribes – the Hoti, Kastrati, Shkreli, and Boga. The flocks of animals and shepherds are bottled up for several weeks in and around Trush near Shkodra until they take to the hills between Zadrima and the sea, or regain their winter quarters along the banks of the Mat River.¹²

Some of these Kelmendi families, indeed, settled on the coast around Lezha for longer periods. Johann Georg von Hahn reported in the mid-nineteenth century:

For about the last ten years they have begun purchasing the land that they have used for centuries for grazing purposes, thus impeding any agricultural usage. They have now begun to

transform it into farmland. The surprising results at the start of this endeavour will probably lead to further success. The average harvest of the richest Kelmendi is 300 horsewaggons of grain at 80 *oka*.¹³

Their stay on the coast and contact with the outside world enabled the Kelmendi to progress intellectually. Many of them learned to read and write in the early years of the twentieth century, without the help of schools. They began to look down on the neighbouring Shala as savage and filthy, *gjin të egër* (wild folk), as they stated, and made fun of their bug-ridden state.¹⁴

On his travels through Kosovo in 1858, which he calls Dardanian Albania, Hahn noted the presence of the Kelmendi tribe in the Llap valley around Podujeva in northeastern Kosovo and in neighbouring Serbia:

Of the 22 villages of Lab [Llap], 20 of them are Clementines [Kelmendi]. The other two belong to Betush [Bytyçi]. They extend from Podujeva to Kurshumlja and inhabit most of the villages in Dedić. On the other hand, there are no Kelmendi in the regions of Vranje and Gilan [Gjilan]. They all regard the Kelmendi, who inhabit the northern Albanian Alps and are of Catholic faith, as their mother tribe, from which at various times individual families moved to Dardania.¹⁵

Among the main families of Kelmendi are the following, divided here according to their usual places of residence in the tribal region:

in Vermosh: Bujaj, Bunjaj, Cali, Hasanaj, Hysaj, Lelçaj, Lekutanaj, Lumaj, Macaj, Miraj, Mitaj, Mërnaçaj, Naçaj, Peraj, Pllumaj, Preljocaj, Racaj, Selmanaj, Shqutaj, Tinaj, Vukaj, Vuktilaj, and Vushaj;

in Selca: Bikaj, Bujaj, Lekutanaj, Mërnaçaj, Miraj, Pllumaj, Rugova, Tinaj, Vukaj, Vushaj;

in Tamara: Bujaj, Bunjaj, Cekaj, Lelçaj, Mërnaçaj, Rukaj and Vukaj; in Vukël: Aliaj, Dacaj, Drejaj, Gjelaç, Gjickolli, Kajabegolli, Martini, Mirukaj, Nicaç, Nilaj, Pepushaj, Vucaç, Vucinaç and Vukli;

in Nikç: Aliaj, Gildedaj, Hasaj, Hutaj, Kapaj, Nikac, Nikçi, Prekelezaj, Preldakaj, Rukaj, Smajlaç and Ujkaj.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Of all the tribes of the north, the Kelmendi were perhaps the best known to the outside world. Indeed, in the seventeenth century, the northern Albanian mountains west of Peja were often referred to simply as the 'mountains of Kelmendi'.¹⁶ The Austro-Hungarian consul in Shkodra, Friedrich Lippich, Ritter von Lindburg (1834–88), described them in 1878 as the strongest of all the Catholic tribes in the highlands of Shkodra.¹⁷ Baron Nopcsa who recorded their oral history in 1907 noted that they were the tribe most referred to of all,¹⁸ and Edith Durham spoke of them as 'some of the finest and most intelligent of the tribesmen'.¹⁹

In popular lore, the Kelmendi were known among the mountain tribes for their heroism, as reflected in the popular saying: 'The wisdom of the Gashi, the watchfulness of the Krasniqja, the wrath of the Berisha, the heroism of the Kelmendi, the slyness of the Shala, a snake in the grass like the Thaçi' (*Mênja e Gashit, sÿni i Krasniqes, inati i Berishës, trimnia e Kelmënit, dredhia e Shaljanit, gjarpnia e Thaçit*).

In oral tradition, the Kelmendi tribe is said to stem from a figure called Klement or Kelmend who, according to Baron Nopcsa's estimate, lived around the years 1470–80. French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard (1814–66) narrates that this Kelmend, a runaway priest, settled in Triepshi where he worked as a shepherd for a rich herdsman who had an aging daughter called Bubçe.²⁰ Kelmend and Bubçe fell in love and she became pregnant. Her father wanted to kill the couple, but let them marry at the insistence of his wife. Bubçe received 20 head of sheep on condition that she and Kelmend leave Triepshi and never return. They moved to a place called Bestana at the foot of Mount 'Gascianik'²¹ on the Cem, and had numerous sons. In one version of the legend, Kelmend is said to have two sons: Kol who founded the settlement of Selca, and Nish or Nika who founded the settlement of Nikç.²² Other versions of the legend give the said Kelmend as having a larger numbers of sons – seven to nine – who at any rate were considered the ancestral fathers of the settlements of Selca, Vukël and Nikç. These sons had children of their own until Bestana became too small to hold them. They thus emigrated and settled in the fertile valley of Gucia [Gusinje] where they were occasionally in conflict with their neighbours and with the Turks.

Johann Georg von Hahn heard the legend of the founding of the Kelmendi tribe from a Father Gabriel in Shkodra in 1850 and recounted it as follows:

Many years ago, there was a rich herdsman in the region of Triepshi. A young man of unknown origin called Klement came by and was employed by the herdsman to take care of his sheep. This the shepherd did together with the herdsman's daughter who was called Bubci. She was lame and had thus not been able to find a husband. With time, their friendship developed into a love affair and the maiden became pregnant. When the girl's mother found out what had happened, she used all the means at her disposal to persuade her rough and heartless husband not to punish the young couple but to allow them to live together. According to custom, he had the right to put them to death. In the end, she succeeded and Klement and Bubci became man and wife. They were given twenty head of livestock and were sent to another mountain region where they were to settle because the old man could not get over the shame on his family caused by their affair.

The mountain area that the new couple received and where they settled was called Bestana. Even today one can see the remains of a small church, a few houses and some overgrown grapevines. It is said that the place had to be abandoned because of the great number of vipers that still exist there. Bestana is situated about four hours from the villages of Selca and Vukël. The land in that area, as the home of their ancestral father, was never apportioned to any tribe members and thus belongs to all of the Kelmendi tribe.

With Bubci, Klement had seven sons. With time, they became the ancestral fathers of the seven largest families that founded the villages of Selca, Vukël, Nikç, Vusanje [Vuthaj] and Martinovići [Martinaj], whence the Kelmendi of Bukova in Dukagjin and of Llap in the mountains of Kosovo stem.

The eldest son was called Kola and was the head of the village of Selca. He had three sons: Vui Kola, Mai Kola and Rabin Kola. The three families that descended from these men formed the population of Selca that now has 350 households and 1,600 souls.

The second son was called Vuco. He had only one son called Deda (which is the equivalent of Italian Domenico). Deda, in turn, had three sons: Uhsai Deda, Giz Deda and Zek (i.e. Joseph) Deda, whose families now make up the village of Vukël that, together with the earlier inhabitants has 170 households and 1,300 souls. The earlier inhabitants are the last remaining representatives of the

original population of the region who, according to legend, were mostly driven out by the Kelmendi. They formed the Gimaj, Pepusaj and Xhireaj families. The Albanians call them the Anes (from Albanian *anë* 'side, edge'), i.e. people who were outside of the ruling tribe.

The third son was called Nika. He had several sons, among whom were Del Nika, Bala Nika and Untha [Vuth] Nika. Del Nika and his descendants founded the village of Nikç that now has 75 households and 500 souls. The two other brothers, Bala and Untha, left Del. They took over the pass between the Prokletije and Plava mountains and built the village of Unthaj [Vuthaj] that is situated half an hour south of the town of Gusinje [Gucia] and six hours north of Selca and now has 70 households and 500 souls.

The other sons of the ancestral father Klement were also blessed with many children so that the tribe flourished rapidly and counted many valiant men. Since the Albanian race is inclined, by nature, to warfare and blood-feuding, the Kelmendi were never satisfied with their lives as simple shepherds, but rather indulged in robbery whenever they had the chance. As the strength of their tribe grew, they extended their attacks more and more into neighbouring territories and even managed to force the region between Gucia, Pester [Pešter] and Pekia [Peja] into submission. These raids and conquests meant that the Kelmendi were constantly involved in warfare with the Ottomans. Three major wars are recorded by tradition: one with Shkodra, one with Podgorica and one with Peja. The first one is said to have lasted ten years, and in one sole confrontation, no less than 10,000 Turks lost their lives. During this war, the Kelmendi withdrew to a natural fortress called Samo Gradi which was also known as the 'Fortress of Kelmendi' (*forca e Kelmendit*). It is a small plateau in the Prokletije mountain range, about half an hour in circumference. It is surrounded on all sides by unassailable cliffs and has only one entrance that is extremely difficult to approach and easy to defend. In the midst of the fortress there is a spring of ice-cold water that never goes dry. On the southern side is a large cave that serves to house the women, children and the few domestic animals they take with them. Since they were often besieged in this refuge by their foes, they suffered much, including periods of starvation when

they were often forced to eat the bark of the trees. When the sieges subsided or when they succeeded in outwitting or getting around the enemy positions, the highlanders took revenge in gruesome attacks in the surroundings and always managed to return with food and booty.

The second war was with Podgorica and lasted seven years. It was no less brutal than the first one because the suffering that the Kelmendi went through in this war was so great that, in seven years, only three boys were born in the village of Selca and they turned out to be weak and sickly.

In the third war against the Pasha of Peja, the Kelmendi were initially lucky and managed to block the Turks in the fortress of Gucia. At that time they made use of portable shield-like baskets that they filled with wool and held in front of them as they advanced over the plain. These baskets protected them from the view of enemy artillery and enabled them to reach the besieged Turks with their long rifles, and wreak great destruction.

They were so sure of victory that the chiefs of the various families began to divide up the enemy territory among themselves. However, a dispute arose during their discussions with regard to certain pasturelands and one of the leaders called Chiobala became so bitter in his unsuccessful endeavour to stake a claim that he betrayed his tribe. During the night, he made contact with the Turks and, in exchange for a promise to be given the pastureland in question, revealed a means by which the Turks could overcome the advance of Kelmendi forces. The Turks followed his advice and, that same night, planted a lot of small stakes in the ground where the Kelmendi usually attacked with their baskets. The next morning, when the Kelmendi realised that they were unable to move their protective baskets freely because of the stakes, they panicked, took flight into their mountains and were pursued by the besieged Turks. From that time on, the war took a bad turn for the Kelmendi and most of them were subsequently forced to emigrate. They had probably become too numerous to survive in the arid mountain regions they inhabited anyway.

It is from the time of this war that we can date the emigration of the Kelmendi to Rugova above Peja, to the mountains of Lap-Gulap [Llap-Gollak] in Kosovo, to Selca (Slavic: Seoca) on the

eastern bank of Lake Shkodra, to the border of Montenegro, and finally to Syrmia where, under the name of Clementines, they still inhabit the villages of Ninkinci and Hrtkovci.

Of those who remained on their tribal land, two colonies later emerged. One settled south of the valley of Kelmendi between the Prokletije and Biskachi mountains and built the village of Boga that now has 40 households and about 400 souls and a banner (*bajrak*) of its own. The other colony went north and built the village of Martinaj on the eastern bank of the Lim River, half an hour from the place where it flows into Lake Plava. The inhabitants of this village converted to Islam, as did their neighbours and fellow tribesmen from the above-mentioned village of Vuthaj.²³

The Kelmendi are regarded as the ancestors of the Rugova highlanders in neighbouring Kosovo who were Catholic until 1760. According to tradition, the arrival of the Kelmendi in Gucia was what caused the Turks to build a fortress there in 1612.²⁴

The earliest historical document to mention the Kelmendi, the Ottoman tax register of 1497, referred to four mountain tribes: the Hoti, the Kuči, the Piperi and the Kelmendi. The Kelmendi are recorded here as having five small shepherding communities with a total of 152 households.²⁵ From such documents and from oral tradition, we may assume that the Kelmendi were thus known as a tribe in the final decades of the fifteenth century. From the tax register, we also know that the Turks accorded the Kelmendi the status of *derbendci* (mountain pass-keepers) and tax privileges. Here is what the document in question states:

It is ordained that the Christians of these villages pay the *sancakbeyi* in the form of a lump sum 1,000 *akçes* of *haraç* or *cizye* [poll-tax], and in the form of a lump sum 1,000 *akçes* of *ispence* [land-tax]. They should not pay any other dues or taxes. They are exempted from all *avariz-i divaniye* [extraordinary state taxes] on condition that they are *derbendcis* [mountain pass-keepers] and guard and protect the road which runs from the fortress of Shkodra through the territory of Petrishpan [Pjetërspan] to Altun-ili [near Gjakova], and also the road which runs from the fortress of Medun into the mountains of Kuči, coming down to Plav.²⁶

The British scholar, Sir Noel Malcolm suggests that the granting of *derbendci* status and the quasi-military privileges that this entailed were of particular importance to the development of the Kelmendi tribe in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, indeed that this may have been the single most important factor in determining their subsequent history. The strengthening of collective identity that this involved may have played an important part in their development as a cohesive clan. In particular, it gave them the right to bear arms, even though they were Christians. In addition, they may have gained leadership skills and prominence over other tribes because it was they, as *derbendcis*, who maintained and probably came to control the trade routes throughout the northern mountains.²⁷

At any rate, in 1565 the ever-restless Kelmendi rose against the Turks, together with the neighbouring Kuči and Piperi tribes,²⁸ and in the 1597 they revolted again under their leader, the *vojvoda*, Nikšić Grdan, this time with the Kuči, Piperi and Bjelopavlići tribes. The Venetian senator Lazaro Soranzo commented on them in 1599–1600 as follows:

These are the Piperi, Kuči, Kelmendi and Bjelopavlići and others in the region of Plava. Among them there are many Albanians, who live by the Roman faith. And these are the ones who, possessing strongholds and being by nature extremely fierce, have still not allowed themselves to be properly subjugated in battle by the Turks.²⁹

By the mid-1580s, the Catholic Kelmendi tribe seems to have ceased paying tribute to the Ottoman state. As fierce and independent-minded warriors, they had, by this time, gradually come to dominate all of northern Albania. They were exceptionally mobile and went raiding and marauding not only in the mountains, but also deep into the territories of Kosovo, Bosnia and Serbia, indeed as far away as Plovdiv in Bulgaria. As Sir Noel Malcolm put it: 'The sheer mobility of the Kelmendi is one of the striking things that emerges about them in the early seventeenth-century reports.'³⁰

In 1612, in order to recover or at least strengthen their position in the mountains, the Turks built a fort at Gucia and this intrusion may have pushed the Kelmendi westwards, more towards their present homeland. In his 'Report and Description of the Sanjak of Shkodra' of

1614, the writer Mariano Bolizza of Kotor, who was in the service of the Republic of Venice, reported on this and on the Kelmendi tribe in general as follows:

Thus, as was mentioned above, three hours from Gucia and an equal number of hours from Kelmendi, the sultan constructed a fort called Città Nova [New Town] at the end of 1612 on a little hill in a well-fortified position. It is as big as a field with a circumference of 400 paces, built of huge beams nailed together and filled with earth, and surrounded by wide moats which are filled with water and was spanned by three drawbridges. The fort is guarded from within by two hundred foot soldiers and fifty cavalrymen. The fortification was constructed at the insistence of Sem Zaus [Cem Çausi], the main Turkish leader in Podgorica. Since he was ruler of Plava and was unable to enjoy his rule there, both because of the destruction wrought by the Kelmendi and because he could not get there safely, he sent word to the sultan in Constantinople by means of the most illustrious lord, Nasuf Pasha, whose concierges and courtiers were interested in ruling over Kelmendi, for a fortress to be constructed in order to repress the furor of the rebels and keep them in check and in submission. And his request was granted. But those who guard it are still unable to prevent the Kelmendi from marauding and pillaging anywhere they want.

Mention was made above of the highland rebels in general. It is now time to go into detail to describe their land, their customs, their battles and things of importance which have occurred among them in 1612 and 1613.

Aside from the fact, as was mentioned above, that these people (who amount to over five thousand three hundred eighty men in arms) are strong because of the nature of their territory, living in such mighty and inaccessible mountains, the main factor of their strength is nonetheless their unity. This unity has been seen ever since the time they resolved at an assembly they held among themselves not to pay the usual tribute to the sultan and, what is more, not to give the individual spahes the duties owed to them, as was said above. This happened because the Turks had oppressed them heavily. They thus swore an oath, as they were wont to do,

not to abandon one another but rather to remain united, to help those in need and never to allow the Turks to enter their territory. Having, in this manner, attained a more favourable situation by overthrowing Turkish tyranny and not having been worn down by indolence, they turned to robbery, travelling in hordes through the Turkish countryside right to Plovdiv and plundering towns, villages and trading caravans, and have become so rich that each of their 188 houses throughout Kelmendi owns twice as many furnishings as usual, including gold and silver equipment for at least one horse: i.e. scimitars, harnesses, collars, and some even have fine saddles with silver and jewelled armour, such a load being worth 150 to 200 gold *zecchini*. They also have expensive horses, exquisite garments of great value, gold and silver cups and bowls and an endless number of animals, small and large. They go armed mostly with swords, shields and spears, and with an endless number of slingshots which they use masterfully. They rarely have arquebuses although all those who do have them, in order to be properly equipped, carry very good gunpowder with them. There are no more than one hundred arquebus men among all the highlanders. These individuals are so agile, expert, courageous and ready for battle and they line up so well for battle that whoever sees them, can do nothing but marvel. They can be seen in armed ranks, in skirmishes, doing battle, attacking and withdrawing, cleaning up and making their escape, such that they actually look very well-trained and versed. Military veterans parade with them on all holidays, and especially on major feast days. Most of them go barefoot so that when they are walking along cliffs, they resemble mountain goats.³¹

The Kelmendi seem thus to have risen against the Turks, together with the neighbouring tribes of Kuči, Piperi and Bjelopavlići, again around 1613. A punitive expedition was sent to quell them with 15,000 men under the command of Arslan (Arsolan) Pasha, the former *sanjakbey* of Skopje. Turkish troops spent 12 days in Kelmendi and took 80 prisoners in one village, though only women and children. In another village, the pasha demanded 15 slaves and 1,000 ducats. However, while he was waiting for a reply, the Kelmendi attacked Turkish troops on a mountain pass, killed 30 men and then spirited off

with 50 of their horses as booty. The pasha of Shkodra was also badly wounded in this attack. Arslan Pasha thus had no alternative but to withdraw to Podgorica.³² A peace agreement was concluded thereafter and peace reigned in the mountains for a few years. The Porte sent troops into Kelmendi territory again in 1617, but to no avail. The Kelmendi continued marauding and plundering, in particular in the region of Novi Pazar, which suffered greatly from their incursions and depredations.

The Kelmendi were at war with the Turks once more in 1624, this time with Arvat Pasha of Shkodra. When Turkish troops advanced into the region, the men of Kelmendi withdrew to the triangular plateau high up in the mountains called the 'Fortress of Kelmendi' (*forca e Kelmendit*) that was surrounded on all sides by steep cliffs. The women, children and elderly, for their part, took refuge in caves in the Cem valley where 200 of them are said to have died of starvation. Though they were in dire straits, they still managed to inflict substantial losses on the Turks.³³

In the following decades, the Turks made numerous efforts to subject the Kelmendi, but with no decisive result, and the Kelmendi continued to play a prominent role in anti-Ottoman resistance, especially in the first half of the seventeenth century. Among their leaders of this period was a certain Vuk Doda. The aim of all these revolts, as with virtually all Albanian uprisings until the end of the Ottoman period in the early twentieth century, was not national liberation, as wishfully portrayed by some modern Albanian historians, but to ensure non-interference in tribal doings (including plundering) and especially not to have to pay any taxes or tribute to the Turks. At the same time, the marauding Kelmendi forced other tribes and regions, where they could, to pay tribute to them. In a report to the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in Rome, dated June 1638, the Albanian Bishop of Sappa and Sarda, Frang Bardhi (Francesco Bianchi),³⁴ noted that they attacked caravans in Albania, Bosnia and Serbia and stole at least 40–50 horseloads of goods each year, such as wool, butter, honey, wax, rice, salted fish, etc. Markets often had to be closed because of them.³⁵ In 1707, an anonymous writer noted:

With raiding, arson and destruction they reduced first the region and then the city [of Peja] itself, to paying annual

contributions [. . .] Every household of the Kelmendi had, in that huge and fertile kingdom, one or more villages which paid it every year whatever was necessary for the dignified subsistence of a noble family.³⁶

Increasingly, the Kelmendi learned to play a tactical role between the Turks and the Venetians, in particular following the outbreak of the Cretan War (1645–69) that was waged between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Venice, during which Dalmatia was a prime theatre of military activity. In 1660, Evliya Çelebi mentioned Kelmendi Albanians among the ‘infidel warriors’ he saw manning Venetian ships in the harbour of Split.³⁷ The Kelmendi promised support to whichever side would fulfil their requests. In 1664, for instance, some of the Kelmendi supported the Turks on condition that they be exempted from paying tribute for five years. Indeed some of them also converted to Islam.

In 1689, during the Great Turkish War of 1683–99, Imperial Austrian forces launched an offensive against Ottoman troops that led to a brief Austrian incursion into Kosovo, Macedonia and northern Albania. This gave the Kelmendi another opportunity to rise against the Ottomans, and it is supposed that they may have been in some tactical alliance with Vienna. We know at least that four Kelmendi chiefs went to negotiate with the Austrians in Peja in December 1689, though they returned discontented because they had not been given suitable presents.³⁸ The Kelmendi preferred marauding for their own benefit, in particular in Kosovo.

In 1700, the pasha of Peja, Hudaverdi Mahmutbegolli, resolved to take action against the continuing Kelmendi depredations in western Kosovo. With the help of other mountain tribes, he managed to block the Kelmendi in their homeland, the gorge of the upper Cem River, from three sides and advanced on them with his own army from Gucia. In 1702, having worn them down by starvation, he forced the majority of them to move to the Pešter plateau in the Sanjak of Novi Pazar. Only the people of Selca were allowed to stay in their homes. Their chief had converted to Islam, and promised to convert his people, too. A total of 251 Kelmendi households (1,987 people) were resettled in the Pešter area on that occasion.³⁹ Others were resettled in the region of Gjilan in Kosovo.

Five years later, in 1707, however, over half of the exiled Kelmendi managed to fight their way back to their mountain homeland and, in 1711, they sent out a large raiding force to bring back some of the others from Pešter, too.⁴⁰ Deprived of their traditional sources of income (plundering and marauding) and bereft of their herds, the Kelmendi lived in great poverty on their return. In the summer of 1710, the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich,⁴¹ asked Franciscan missionaries in Albania to distribute money to them to buy grain, and appealed to the pope on several occasions to do something for the '*poveri Clementi*'.⁴² Some Kelmendi did remain on the Pešter plateau. The Archbishop of Skopje reported that there were 2,000 in 1719, when he confirmed 800 of them.⁴³

In early August 1737, Hapsburg forces once again invaded Kosovo and Field Marshal Friedrich Heinrich von Seckendorff⁴⁴ recaptured Prishtina. It was in this period that the Kelmendi, both in their homeland and in Pešter, and other mountain tribes, decided to ally themselves with the Austrians. The Austrian advance, however, petered out within three weeks, as did the native uprisings against the Turks, which Austrian forces had fostered. Novi Pazar fell on 24 August 1737, where 200 Kelmendi, 200 Hoti and 100 Gruda fighters had advanced.⁴⁵ In the wake of the Austrian withdrawal, the Albanian and Serbian rebels, including the Kelmendi, had no choice but to retreat northwards, and suffered huge losses. On 4 October, they sent a delegation to Seckendorff, asking for land in Banat for their seven *rodova* (extended families), with 4,000 persons and their 100,000 animals.⁴⁶ They managed to reach a safe haven in Austrian-controlled territory near Belgrade, but they lived initially in extreme hardship and poverty. According to Ludwig von Thallóczy: 'They wandered around Karlovac as nomads along the Sava [...] they dug holes in the ground to live in [...] they were decimated by plagues and epidemics, and they suffered from want of food, which was always lacking, often entirely.'⁴⁷ In their despair, some of them even returned to Ottoman territory. An early nineteenth-century German-language encyclopaedia provides the following information on the exiled Kelmendi in its entry on the 'Clementiner':

In 1737 they advanced on the Turks, but were almost all slaughtered at Valjevo. Of those who survived, 300 left for

Belgrade with their families, whence, being led by one of their priests Suno, they continued on to Syrmia where they founded the villages of Hrtkovci and Nikinci on the Sava, in the region of Mitrovica, and, divided into six families, they served as brave border guards [...] Those who remained behind were attacked by the Turks in 1738 and their main settlement of Rudnik was conquered.⁴⁸

It was only after the Peace of Belgrade in 1739 that the situation of the Kelmendi improved. Employed as border guards and exempted from taxes for three years, they came to form eight companies of militia, each with 25–100 men, and kept guard along the Sava River.⁴⁹ In 1749 or 1755, about 1,600 of them were finally settled in Syrmia [Srem], in particular in the villages of Nikinci, Hrtkovci and Jarak. There they remained, preserving their language, customs and Catholic religion until the nineteenth century. The colourful costumes of the Kelmendi women were much commented upon. Karl Gottlieb von Windisch (1725–93), for instance, noted: ‘The costumes of the womenfolk of these people are extremely curious. The peacock, indeed the rainbow, could not be more colourful than a Kelmendi woman when she gets all dressed up.’⁵⁰ In 1883 there were still 70 Albanian speakers in Nikinci and, in the census of 1900, 37 of the 2,565 inhabitants of Hrtkovci still spoke Albanian, as did 18 of the 1,773 inhabitants of Nikinci.⁵¹ In 1921, there were only five Albanian speakers left in Hrtkovci and four in Nikinci,⁵² and the language died out soon thereafter.

As to the Kelmendi who remained in Albania, they continued their struggle to resist Turkish incursions. Major punitive expeditions of Ottoman forces were sent into the mountains in 1737, 1738 and 1739 to put down the rebellious Kelmendi and Kuči tribes, but to no avail. In 1740, however, Sulejman Pasha of Shkodra killed 40 leading tribesmen of Kelmendi and Kuči, confiscated their property and burnt their houses down. A further 400 tribesmen were imprisoned in Shkodra. The two tribes had no choice but to capitulate and sent hostages to Shkodra. After submission, the Albanian market towns were re-opened for them.⁵³ Although they remained a powerful tribe in northern Albania over the following 150 years, they never regained the power they had enjoyed in the seventeenth century.

Travel Impressions

Baron Nopcsa travelled to Kelmendi in 1905. He records this impression of his arrival after the long march down into the Cem Valley:

I was deeply impressed by an episode that occurred in the Cem Valley near the Tamara Bridge in Kelmendi country. I had asked for a glass of water at a house but, instead of water, the head of the household, whom I did not know at all, gave me a bowl of buttermilk, which I drank to the very last drop. I had just finished drinking when the brother of the homeowner, also unknown to me, happened to come home. As it was evening by this time and he was tired from his long journey, he asked to have some buttermilk. All that he found of course was an empty bowl. When the owner of the house told him who had drunk all the buttermilk, he was not upset, as one might have expected, but rather happy and relieved that I had reached the house before he had, because his family had thus been spared the shame of letting guests depart without having offered them something to eat.⁵⁴

Figures of Note

Nora of Kelmendi

Nora of Kelmendi is a legendary figure in the northern mountains. She is remembered for her courage. According to the core of the legend (of which there are several versions), a seventeenth-century Ottoman commander, usually called Vutsi Pasha of Bosnia, invaded Kelmendi with his troops. There he caught sight of the fair Nora and demanded her as a condition for his withdrawal. Nora gave herself up to the pasha, but killed him with her dagger, thus sacrificing herself for the freedom of Kelmendi.

Prekë Cali

Prekë Cali Hasanaj (1878–1945), the nephew of Uçë Turku, the *vojvoda* of Selca, was a great nationalist figure of the north, the ‘Pride of Kelmendi’. He opposed Ottoman forces in April–June 1911, in particular at the Battle of Dečić. Cali is also remembered as a fierce opponent of Montenegrin expansion into Albania, especially when the

Great Powers accorded parts of the north of the country, around Vermosh, to Montenegro at the Conference of London (1913). He later opposed Ahmet Zogu (1895–1961) and was interned by him in Gjirokastra, but was pardoned in 1927 and was made a captain of the reserve guards. Prekë Cali was a strident anticommunist. When communist forces under Mehmet Shehu (1913–81) took over Kelmendi in January 1945, Prekë Cali and 14 other Kelmendi fighters were taken prisoner. They were tried in court in Shkodra and shot at Zalli i Kirit on 25 March 1945. A statue was raised in Shkodra in June 2001 bearing the inscription: 'Prekë Cali, noted fighter from Kelmendi, resolute defender of Albania's borders.'

The Gruda Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Gruda tribal region is situated in Montenegro, primarily in the mountains along the Albanian border, southeast of Podgorica. The core of Gruda territory extends eastwards from Tuz [Tuzi] up the lower slopes of the Cem [Cijevna] River in a triangular shape towards the present Albanian–Montenegrin border. There are Gruda settlements on both sides of the river. Gruda land traditionally also covered much of the plain, where it extended to the lake in the south and to the Morača River in the west and to the Cem River in the north of the plain. Gruda bordered on the traditional tribal regions of Hoti to the south, Kelmendi to the east, Triepshi to the northeast and Slavic Kuči to the north. The main settlements of Gruda include: Dinosha [Dinoša], Pikala [Pikalja], Kësheva [Krševo], Shipshanik [Šipčanik], Llofka [Lovka], Mileshe [Mileš] and Selishta [Selište]. The market town for Gruda was the town of Tuz on the broad plain south of Podgorica.

Population

The name Gruda was recorded in the ecclesiastical report of Francesco Leonardi in 1648 as *Grudi* and in the report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari in 1671 as *Gruda*. The term *Gruda* is also found on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola. The word is said to be related to Alb. *grudë*, *gruda* 'soil, sod', from Slav. *gruda*.

With regard to population statistics, in his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains' in 1841, Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gives the population of Gruda as 1,200, of whom 300 were men in arms.⁵⁵ Subsequently, the Italian botanist and geographer Antonio Baldacci (1867–1950) mentioned 400 houses, and Edith Durham spoke in 1908 of 'about 500 houses'. Baron Nopcsa regarded these figures as somewhat exaggerated, and in 1907 calculated the total population of Gruda at less than 3,000.

Gruda was a primarily Catholic tribe although much of it converted to Islam at the end of the seventeenth century. The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported on the state of Catholicism there at the time:

In Gruda, there is a church dedicated to Saint Martin that is in ruins. It would be good to have it repaired for the numerous people here. Costs 125 *scudi*,⁵⁶ as mentioned in number 88. The people of Gruda constructed a hospice for the Patres Reformati of the Holy Congregation for the mission priests in that place, and have kept it in good condition. There are two such fathers there, both of them priests. The first one is Brother Bartolomeo of Urbino. The second one is Brother Domenico dalle Grotte. The father did not know the Albanian language very well and was ill with a fever [...]. He did not use the Christian Doctrine. He had high moral standards and was a good clergyman. The second one knew some Albanian and endeavoured to instruct the people. He also led a good life and had high moral standards.⁵⁷

In the early years of the twentieth century, Edith Durham referred to the tribe as being half Catholic, half Muslim. In 1907 Baron Franz Nopcsa estimated that it was two-thirds Catholic and one-third Muslim, most of the latter living in Tuz, Milesh and Dinosh. As in Lura and other regions, there were families with both Catholic and Muslim members.

The Catholics of Gruda commemorated the feast of the nativity of the Virgin Mary on 8 September. The oldest church of the region is that of Priftën, known as the Church of Gruda (*Kisha e Grudës*), originally constructed in 1528. The Church of Saint Martin, mentioned by Gaspari, was constructed by the Franciscans in 1646, although with the

rapid conversion of the population to Islam, it was soon abandoned by the order.⁵⁸ It was reconstructed in 1900 by one Father Mirashi (who was actually the Italian priest Teodosio de Parma), and a parsonage was added in 1907.⁵⁹

Gruda was a tribe that consisted of one single *bajrak*. It was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor. Among the noted families of Gruda are the: Beqja, Berishaj, Bojaj, Gjokaj, Gjolaj, Hakaj, Haxhaj, Ivezaj, Kajoshaj, Kalaj, Lulanaj, Lulgjuraj, Neziraj, Nikaj, Pepaj, Sinishtaj, Stanaj, Vuçinaj and Vulaj.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Before the completion of the Ottoman conquest, the Gruda region was part of the realm of Ivan Crnojević (reg. 1465–90), Lord of Zeta, who was married to the sister of the Albanian leader, George Arianiti (ca. 1400–61), the father-in-law of Scanderbeg. He was defeated by the Turks in about 1477 and it was after this period that the ancestors of the Gruda tribe settled on their present land from various origins. Some of them came from the Berisha tribe, others from neighbouring Piperi, and others still arrived in the early sixteenth century from Herzegovina. In oral tradition, mention is made in particular of a certain Vuksan Gjela who fled his native Suma region and settled in Gruda around 1550 because of a blood feud. He was a great foe of the Turks, having been imprisoned in Anatolia for 12 years on orders from the vizier of Shkodra, and is said to have had himself buried on the top of Suka e Grudës (Gruda Hill, 1,212 m.) so that no hooves of Turkish horses could ever ride over him. He had two sons, Pal and Gjela, of whom the former is remembered as the founder of the settlements of Selishta, Llofka and Gjokaj near Dinosh. Another version of the legend of origin derives the tribe from one Grudë Suma of the Suma tribe⁶⁰ who is probably the same figure as the above-mentioned Vuksan Gjela. This Grudë Suma lived in the cave of Biga e Rohëve.

In 1485, Gruda was recorded as a *nabiye* in terms of Ottoman administration. In 1499 it rose with Hoti against Ottoman demands for taxes and conscripts, and was also involved in a series of revolts in the seventeenth century, often together with Kelmendi, Kuçi, Hoti, Kastrati and Shkreli, etc.

Despite its eclectic origins and diverse religious affiliations, the Gruda came to form one united tribe consisting initially of two *bajraks*, one in Dinosha and one in Llofka. These later united. The *bajraktar* of Gruda was traditionally chosen from the descendants of Vuksan Gjela of the Suma clan.

It was always a struggle for survival in Gruda because the soil in the mountainous areas was not particularly fertile, and the region suffered much from drought. The population thus lived traditionally from herding.

The Gruda tribe played a major role, together with Hoti, in an attempt to counter the loss to Albania of this border territory which was accorded to Montenegro by the Congress of Berlin in 1878. From April to July 1880, under the command of Hodo Pasha Dervishi (1836–83), also known as Hodo bey Sokoli, about 8,000 volunteers from the Shkodra region, including many fighters from Gruda and Hoti, struggled to keep the two tribal regions, and in particular the plain of Tuz, as part of Ottoman Albania. Their efforts were successful for a time, and Gruda remained part of Ottoman Albania for another two decades. The Gruda tribe also took part in the northern Albanian uprisings against the Porte in 1910 and 1911.

In 1913, in the wake of Albanian independence, the Great Powers at the Conference of London awarded Gruda and Hoti to Montenegro, thus cutting them off from the rest of Albania and from the other Albanian highland tribes. Montenegrin forces invaded Gruda territory in the spring of 1913, and much resistance was offered to them, in particular on 30 and 31 May, with many dead and injured. In July 1913, emissaries of Prince Nikola of Montenegro offered tribal leaders money and grain supplies in a bid to win them over to Montenegro, but they refused to be separated from the newly independent Albanian state. As a reaction to the Montenegrin occupation of Tuz in mid-July 1913, Gruda sent a large deputation to Vice-Admiral Sir Cecil Burney (1858–1929), the head of the international administration in Shkodra, to convey to him their resolve not to submit to Montenegro. Border skirmishes, and often serious fighting, continued over the next six months and, by mid-April 1914, the Montenegrin government announced its definitive military occupation of Gruda and Hoti. Most of the settlements in Gruda territory were razed to the ground by the Montenegrin commander Martinović. The surviving population, some 700 families from Gruda and Hoti, fled to Kastrati territory around 23 April 1914, and

by May many of them had reached Shkodra where they camped out in desperate circumstances. The British journalist E. J. Dillon (1854–1933), who was in northern Albania at the time, reported as follows:

The subjection of the Hoti and Gruda clan was accompanied by the flight of thousands of necessitous tribesmen into Scutari, whose arrival thrust the inhabitants of that city into dismay. The British Governor, Colonel Phillips, on taking over the governorship, had been assured by his predecessors, the Admirals, that everything was in order, that the refugees would not exceed a few hundred, and that ample provision had been made for their reception and keep. Events belied this optimistic forecast. Nineteen thousand fugitives swept down the hills one day and strained the resourcefulness of the Governor to the utmost. He drove most of them back and made provision for nearly two thousand, despite the circumstances that there were no funds available for them.⁶¹

This was not the last time Gruda was to be put to task. Edith Durham later noted:

The Powers awarded it to Montenegro in 1913 as a war prize in spite of the prayers of the people. It was devastated and many refugees fled to Scutari. Again, after the Great War, it was badly handled by the incoming Serbs, who were active against Moslem and Catholic alike. They even tore the rings from the hands of a poor old lady whose only crime was that she was Catholic. I saw many hapless refugees in Scutari in 1921, but was powerless to help them. As in the days of the Turk, a new foe was forcing a shifting of the peoples.⁶²

Part of the population emigrated around 1914 and settled on the plain north of Shkodra, forming the settlement of Gruda e Re (New Gruda) near Dobraq.

Travel Impressions

Baron Nopcsa travelled through Gruda territory in August 1907 with a group of Gruda tribesmen who were returning from work abroad.

At Dinoshë, he managed to cross the border illegally into Ottoman Albania:

It was 37 degrees in the shade on 8 August 1907 when I left Podgorica to tour the isolated reaches of the Montenegrin and Albanian mountains, as was my plan. This region was the Shangri-La of the 'Accursed Mountains,' most peaks of which had never been climbed.

Mar Gjeku and I mixed in with a group of people shuffling towards the Turkish border. They were members of the Gruda tribe returning from market in Podgorica. There were also about a dozen other Gruda men who, like Mar, had worked at the Tótmegyer brick factory near Budapest, had made good money and were returning home in good spirits after half a year abroad.

Mark Gjeka, another of my prominent new friends, had found a shaggy but sturdy packhorse to carry my things, not only my pack but all the personal effects of my travelling companions. These consisted mainly of maize and salt. Since the Albanians returning from abroad had all sorts of other things with them, such as blankets, pots, a lantern and other household objects, the back of the horse was piled high in colourful confusion. A heavy frying pan had to be carried by its owner, much to the amusement of the other travellers. Everyone laughed when this tall fellow armed with a Martini rifle used the frying pan as a rather impractical parasol. My companions were particularly aware of the humour involved because most of them were carrying real parasols in red and blue stripes with them. Of all luxury goods to have entered Albania, the parasol is the most common. It could almost compete with soap as the number-one 'luxury article.' The midday heat allayed by a southern breeze, did nothing to impair the merriment of the travellers marching on foot. Mark Gjeka and his men were very much looking forward to getting back home after half a year away. Their family members, who had come down to Podgorica to meet them, were delighted to see the adventurers back, and I was personally fascinated by the situation, which was completely new to me. I knew Albania and its friendly, though often uncivilized inhabitants from earlier trips. In most cases, my expeditions had begun in Shkodra and consisted of day journeys from parish

priest to parish priest. This time, I had suddenly left 'Europe' and was in direct contact with the highland population. I had another reason to be in good spirits, too. There seemed to be a good chance that I would be able to climb the highest, virgin peaks of Northern Albania.

We had left the plain behind us between Podgorica with its numerous Albanian shops, a town of importance to Montenegro, and Tuz, or rather between Podgorica and our next stop, the Turkish border settlement of Dinosh. It was a barren region covered in limestone scree that evinced a few fields of harvested grain here and there. The landscape was in pleasant brownish hues from the limestone, the leftovers of the harvest and the drought of the past weeks. The roundish limestone mountains rising to the east, though not to any great height, offered no unusual forms and glowed in a light grey colour.

The plain, covered in diluvian scree, was neither geographically nor geologically of interest. As such, my attention was focused entirely on the conversations of my new companions. The Gruda men spoke primarily of their impressions of Budapest, and I was rather surprised how often they compared it to Shkodra. Questions from their relatives about whether the bazaar in Budapest was as big as the one in Shkodra were typical of the thinking of people who had never been beyond the borders of their own country. I suspected that what was said about Budapest and 'Europe' during the march broadened the horizons of the native family members.

From Dinosh we crossed a stream that is not marked on the general map (1:200,000) but is probably identical to the one mentioned by E. Schulz. Its banks, in different horizontal and conglomerate stone strata rose sharply as a result of erosion from recurring periods of flooding. They offered us a bit of shade, but not much relief from the heat. The men of course took advantage of the shade right away to smoke a cigarette. We were all crouched under the protruding banks when, in no time, large leather half-kilo pouches of tobacco were brought forth, none of which contained the seals of the Ottoman Tobacco Régie. The women in our party had to put up with a less shady spot, but were nonetheless given some cigarettes.

My friends surprised me by offering me a large bottle of milk that they had brought with them for me from Podgorica without my noticing. They had been afraid that it would spill during the march. Such little acts of unassuming kindness in detail are one of the commonly found characteristics of the inhabitants of the northern Albanian mountains, gestures that are, alas, so often lacking in Europe.

Refreshed by our stop, we reached the Turkish–Montenegrin border at two in the afternoon. The border crossing, near Omer Bozovci, has no particular markings, unless one knows that numerous wild-growing pomegranate shrubs and other thorny Mediterranean-type bushes signal the presence of a near-by settlement.

Not far from Dinosa, I was shown the remains of an apparently very old church. Unfortunately there were no stone ornaments or inscriptions left to judge its age.

The Imperial Ottoman authorities were represented in Dinosa by a customs official and a platoon of soldiers on duty, *nizams*, all in fine uniforms.

When we got there, all of the policemen were sound asleep. We had intentionally left Podgorica around noontime, knowing that all Turkish officials had a siesta in the afternoon heat. The only official who was awake was a *koldži*, a customs guard, who was having a cup of coffee at the inn of Dinosa. The *koldži* naturally wanted to inspect the baggage piled high on my horse, which contained my rifle, too. Mar persuaded him to have a glass of raspberry syrup with us first. The *koldži* agreed. The first glass of syrup was followed by a cup of coffee, which was followed by another glass of syrup, and then another coffee etc., etc. All of this took up over an hour. When the *koldži* finally came down the stairs to inspect the packhorse, the other Albanians explained to him that they had not been able to wait for the inspection. They had sent the ‘lame’ horse on with the women so that it would reach Selita by sunset. It was very slow and, if it did not arrive by nightfall, it would certainly break a leg in the dark, with the path as bad as it was. The *koldži* was faced with a *fait accompli* and, with his protest that he would inspect the horse all the more rigorously next time, the matter was put to rest.

Satisfied at having been treated to syrup and coffee for over an hour, the *koldži* did not even think of asking for my passport. I was glad of that for, unbeknownst to Mar Gjeku, I had a visa for Shkodra so nothing serious would have happened to me, but I knew that I would have problems getting a travel permit for the mountains had they sent me to Shkodra. For this reason, I thought it better not to use my passport at all, and did not tell Mar about my visa so that he would be extra cautious when we crossed the border. On top of this, I had initially told him that I was not even interested in going to Albania. I had to seem consequent with Mar. At any rate, with his trick, I got across the Turkish–Montenegrin border without being recognized and was for some time able to travel in the highlands of Albania freely. Things changed later, however, when the Turkish authorities discovered that I was back in the country.

When we got past Dinosa, the scenery and the mood changed dramatically. As we entered the Cem Valley, the expressions on the faces of my placid companions changed and grew tense. Now that they were back in the country, the Albanians all hastened to retrieve the Martini and Werndl rifles that they had deposited at the homes of friends on the way.

The return of the Gruda men to their tribal homeland was celebrated as a victory. They were greeted by calls and rifle shots from the promontories and the other bank of the Cem. News spread like wildfire that the men of Gruda who had first ventured to try their luck and seek employment abroad had defied the odds and returned safe and sound. The twenty-five Napoleons that Mark Gjeka pulled out of his pocket were better proof than anything of the financial success of the mission. However, the blisters on their hands caused great consternation among their Gruda compatriots because hard physical labour is not the favourite pastime of men in the highlands.

Our further advance was slow because everyone one who saw and greeted us with a *hoj gelden*,⁶³ the standard greeting in Gruda, wanted to know what the returnees had been doing and how their stay in Budapest had gone. We passed no settlement without having to stop for a glass of milk, a cup of coffee or at least a sip of water.

The Cem Valley, up which we travelled from Dinosa to Selishta, is interesting because of the cave inhabitations that are still being

used and probably date from ancient times. As in Dinosa, stone-hard diluvial sediment rises on the riverbanks over other layers that have been washed away by the rain and have created caverns that serve as accommodation. They are fenced off either by a low stone wall or by a wicker fence and are used by shepherds in the summer months. In the daytime, most of these people are outdoors for lack of room. We were thus welcomed and entertained for the most part by these modern-day troglodytes, who were neither hostile nor particularly savage.

Aside from meeting shepherds, there were other things that delayed our progress up the Cem Valley. Wherever there was a bit of flat land along the river, there were cultivated fields that produced tobacco, maize or grain. Grapes hung in abundance from the vines in the hedges. They had owners, but no one took offense when passers-by plucked and gorged themselves on the fruit. On the contrary, they would have found it strange if travellers did not stop and partake.

Shepherds, *kullas*, cottages and grapevines thus slowed down our progress and we reached Selishta much later than planned. Just before we got to Mark Gjeka's house, we had to cross the Cem on a hanging bridge made of precarious-looking woven rods.

On 9 August I left Mark Gjeka's hospitable home and climbed up to the parish of Gruda at 320 m. above sea level. From there, I carried on to Trabojna.⁶⁴

Figures of Note

Baca Kurti

Baca Kurti Gjokaj (ca. 1807–81) was a nationalist figure of the Gruda tribe. He was born in Mileshe near Tuz of the Catholic Gjokaj family and first became prominent as the *voyvoda* of Gruda while putting down a band of marauding rebels in Fundna in 1856. He also killed the brother of the Montenegrin warrior Marko Miljanov (1833–1901) that year. By 1870 his authority was well recognised and in 1878 he did much to pacify blood feuds in Gruda and Triepshi. In June 1878, the Great Powers meeting at the Congress of Berlin decided to hand over the Ottoman-Albanian territories of Plava and Gucia to Montenegro. When this was militarily opposed by Albanian rebels under

Ali Pasha of Gucia, the Italian ambassador in Constantinople, Count Luigi Corti, suggested as a compromise that territory along the Cem River, i.e. the tribal land of Gruda and Hoti, be given to Montenegro instead (the so-called Corti Compromise). Montenegro was to occupy the region on 22 April 1880. Baca Kurti, who was involved throughout this period in the activities of the League of Prizren, was among the tribal leaders who vigorously opposed the annexation. He called on the highlanders, Catholics and Muslims, to defend their land at the Rrzhanica Bridge, which marked the border between Montenegro and the Ottoman Empire. He is remembered, in particular, for proclaiming: 'Brothers! The enemy on the attack. Whoever wishes to die today for his country and for the honour of his weapons, let him follow me!' The Catholic tribes gathered forces in Tuz and were reinforced by men from Mirdita and the Muslim tribes, a total of some 10,000 fighters, it is said. In late April 1880, Baca Kurti and the military commander, Çun Mula, the *bajraktar* of Hoti, thus managed to repulse the Montenegrin army at the bridge, and the plan for the annexation of Gruda and Hoti was put aside. Montenegro was instead given the Albanian port of Ulqin/Ulcinj by the Powers. Baca Kurti died at his home in Milesh, apparently of poisoning, and lies buried in Saint Michel's graveyard in Dinosha.

Tringa Smajli

Tringa Smajli (1870–1917), the daughter of Smajl Martini Ivezaj, is remembered as the highland heroine of Gruda, who took part in the uprising of 1911 against Ottoman forces. Her father was kidnapped at the Battle of Vranje in 1911 and was never seen alive again. She replaced him in battle and led Gruda forces to victory. With this deed, her fame spread and 'Tringa of Gruda' became a legendary heroine in the Balkans. *The New York Times* described her as the 'Albanian Joan of Arc':

A young girl, whose first name corresponds to that of the given name of the Maid of Orleans, is now being sung in the songs of the Montenegrin bards in the inns and coffee houses of Podgoritsa. When at the battle of Vranje last week her father, the hereditary commander of his clan, fell, she immediately stepped to his place and led the Martinais to victory against the Turks [...]. According to a person who is well acquainted with her, this new Joan of Arc is not yet 22 years of age, and is 'a tall,

handsome, well-developed young woman. All the Albanian women are brave, and are trained from their girlhood to the use of firearms, and in times of war, as there are no mules, they carry the provisions and ammunition for their soldiers and go into the firing line to distribute them.’⁶⁵

Tringa Smajli was buried in an unmarked grave in her native village of Kësheva in Gruda territory.

The Hoti Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Hoti tribal region is situated in the District of Malësia e Madhe in northern Albania. It stretches in a northeasterly direction up the valley that begins at the end of the eastern arm of Lake Shkodra, near the Albanian–Montenegrin border-crossing of Han i Hotit (‘The Inn of Hoti’), and continues up into the mountains past Brigja to the village of Rapshë-Starje at the summit. The road from the coast towards Kelmendi territory and Vermosh leads initially up this valley, parallel to the Albanian–Montenegrin border. Hoti territory also extended along the lake, into what is now Montenegro, to the bay of Hum [Humsko Blato], and up into the first valley to Helmes and Trabojna, on the northern side of Mount Bukoviq. Hoti borders on the traditional tribal regions of Gruda to the north in Montenegro, Kelmendi to the northeast, and Kastrati to the south. The main settlements of Hoti are: Hot and Rapshë-Starje (Rapsha e Hotit) in Albania; and Arza, Helmes and Trabojna in Montenegro.

Population

The term Hoti was recorded as a personal name in 1330. In 1474, the region was called *montanee octorum*, *montanea ottanorum* (mountain(s) of the Hoti). The form *Hotti* is mentioned in a report sent to Rome in September 1621 by the Albanian bishop of Sappa and Sarda, Pjeter Budi, and in the ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari in 1671. *Hotti* also occurs in the report of Giorgio Starnpaneo around 1685, and on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola.

In 1614, the Venetian writer Mariano Bolizza of Kotor spoke of 212 houses in Hoti, commanded by one Marash Papa, and with 600 men in

arms.⁶⁶ In 1838, the Austro-Hungarian physician Joseph Müller was informed by a Pater Deda of Vukël that there were 1,500 inhabitants in Hoti.⁶⁷ At about the same time (1841), in his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains,' Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gave the population of Hoti as 2,400, of whom 600 were men in arms.⁶⁸ On the basis of a census carried out in 1854, the French diplomat Hyacinthe Hecquard recorded the presence of 450 families in Hoti.⁶⁹ Another French diplomat, Emile Wiet, consul in Shkodra, recorded 400 households of Hoti comprising 2,442 Catholics, plus five Muslim households in a settlement called Sunci.⁷⁰ Other mid and late nineteenth-century writers also refer to between 400 and 500 families. We can thus estimate the population of Hoti to have been about 4,000 at that time. Edith Durham refers to Hoti in the first decade of the twentieth century as being one *bajrak* made up of 500 houses.⁷¹

Hoti is a traditionally Catholic tribe. Its patron saint is John the Baptist whose feast day, Saint John of Hoti (*Shënjoni i Hotit*), was celebrated each year on 29 August. The parish church of Brigja, built in 1699, was dedicated to Saint John the Baptist. Only a few stones and a graveyard remain of it. The tribe also observed the winter feast of Saint Nicholas which lasted a whole week. The church in Hoti itself was dedicated to Saint Veneranda. The church in Rapsha e Hotit was built in 1699 by the Franciscans who were soon, however, forced to abandon it. A parsonage was added in 1907, funded by Austria-Hungary. In Trabojna there has been a Catholic parish since 1648 although it was often abandoned.⁷²

A few families in Hoti converted to Islam in the Ottoman period. However, the religious division does not seem to have caused any lasting problems within the tribe. Ten families in Rapsha, for instance, converted to Islam around 1800 and were granted the privilege by the pasha of choosing their own military leader (called a *boulouk basha* or *voyvoda*), a post subsequently held by the Hasan Aga family.

The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported:

On 12 September 1671, we left the land of Castratti [Kastrati] and arrived at the village of Hotti [Hot] which is 25 miles from Riolo [Rrjoll]. It has 130 homes and 700 souls. It has a church dedicated to Saint Veneranda, the roof of which is in need of repair. Cost 30 *scudi*. There is no priest, but they are under the care of Gruda where

the Patres Reformati are stationed, 26 miles from Hoti. Due to the great distance, however, they cannot provide sufficient assistance. Many people die without receiving the sacraments and are buried without cross and candle, as I can testify. To care for the needs of those souls, it would be necessary to set up a mission in this place, either with regular priests or secular clergy, which would involve a one-time provision of 30 *scudi*, and holy furnishings.⁷³

The Hoti tribe were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of one *bajrak*. They traditionally married with neighbouring Kastrati, so relations between the two tribes were close. It was also closely related to the Triepshi and Gruda tribes.

Compared to many other regions of the Albanian highlands, the valley of Hoti was comparatively fertile. In addition to their herds of sheep and goats, the tribe grew wheat, barley, oats and maize, and had fish from the lake, bleak in particular, that it shared with the Kastrati tribe. It was thus relatively self-sufficient and able to prosper.

Among the noted families of Hoti are the: Cunmullaj, Camaj, Dedvukaj, Dushaj, Gjellaj, Gjonaj, Gojçaj, Junçaj, Lajqaj, Lucgjonaj and Nicaçj.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

As to their origins, oral tradition has it that the Hoti arrived from Bosnia. They claimed early descent from a Slav, probably therefore a Bosnian Slav, called Keq Preka (sometimes known as Kec Panta) who fled to what is now Piperi territory in Montenegro and lived around 1520. He had several sons, called Lazar Keqi, Ban Keqi, Kaster Keqi, Merkota Keqi, Vas Keqi and Piper Keqi. The first son, Lazar, is considered to be the ancestral father of the Hoti tribe, whereas his brother Ban was the ancestor of the Triepshi tribe, which is thus related to the Hoti. Following a murder, the family had to flee from the Piperi region. Only father Keq Preka and his one son, Piper, were allowed to remain. Two of the sons, Lazar Keqi and Ban Keqi, fled to Triepshi territory, where they prospered as herders. With time, the size of their flocks increased to such an extent that they could no longer feed the animals in the barren mountains there. The two brothers therefore divided the herds up between them and Lazar migrated southwards across the Cem River

which was then said to make up the border between them. Lazar Keqi had one son called Geg Keqi or Geg Lazri or Lazi who is regarded as the direct father of the Hoti tribe. His son Pjetër or Pjec Gega founded the settlement of Trabojna. Geg's other sons, Gjon Gega, Laj Gega and Gjun Gega, are remembered as founders of the settlement of Rapsha. Gjon Gega's descendants later lived in Brigja. The settlement of Vuksanlekaj, for its part, is said to have been founded by one Vuksa, son of Leka, around the year 1788.

The Austrian consul in Janina, Johann Georg von Hahn, heard the legend of the founding of the Hoti and Triepshi tribes from a Father Gabriel in Shkodra in 1850 and recounted it as follows:

The ancestral tribal leader of Hoti and Triepshi was called Keqi. It is not known where he came from but, like Klement of Kelmendi, he must have been an Albanian because his descendants spoke Albanian and were Catholic. According to legend, because he was being pursued by the Turks, he fled to a Slavic region now called Piperi that belongs to the Brda [highlands] of Montenegro. There, he had six sons: Lazar Keqi, Ban Keqi, Merkota Keqi, Kaster Keqi, Vas (Vash) Keqi and Piper Keqi. When they were growing up, they killed one of the natives of the village and, according to local custom, the whole family was obliged to flee. Father Keqi, however, realised that he was too old to leave, and that his youngest son, Piper, was too young and weak (he limped on one leg) to follow his brothers into exile. He therefore endeavoured to pacify the family of the dead man and begged for permission to remain in the country in view of his and his son's precarious situation. He received permission, which is rarely denied under such circumstances, and thus remained in the village with Piper. The large clan of Piperi that now has 200 households and 1,500 Orthodox, Slavic-speaking members, stems from this lad Piper. They are in constant conflict with the neighbouring Muslim towns of Spuž and Podgorica.

The other five brothers settled in Triepshi that is situated on the northern bank of the Cem River (a western tributary of the Morača), an hour to the east of Gruda and Fundina. Merkota Keqi soon found life in this stony region too hard so he settled on the plain of Podgorica, two hours to the west of the town, because he

preferred to make his living in a fertile area rather than to wander freely and independently in the mountains. His descendants gave the village which they had founded the name Merkotaj [Mrkovići] after their ancestral father. It now has 70 households and over 500 souls. They are followers of the Orthodox church and speak Slavic.

The other four sons of Keqi remained for a while in Triepshi. However, there came a time of great hardship for the region and grain could only be procured on the fertile plains and in the valley of the White Drin far to the east. The two youngest brothers, who were unmarried, therefore set off for the town of Peja to buy grain for their families. At the inn where they were staying, they met two fair maidens who had come to Peja for the same reason. The maidens took a fancy to the slender lads and asked them who they were and where they came from. The young men told them the sad tale of their family, that they were poor shepherds treated badly by fate. The maidens replied that they were, each of them, the only daughters of rich parents and if the young men would marry them, they would inherit substantial fortunes. They also told them that there was enough fertile land where they came from to feed the two brothers. The young men raised the objection that their older brothers would not go with them and that they could not leave their elderly father alone. They did not live with him, but were not so far away that they could not visit him from time to time. After much discussion, the four young people agreed to meet at a later date in the same inn to exchange information about what they had achieved. Each then went his own way. When the two young men got home, they told their brothers what had happened and asked for their advice. The brothers advised them not to leave because this would weaken the position of the family and others would be able to insult them and go unpunished. They feared that they would never see one another again if they were to live so far away. These objections convinced the two young brothers for quite a while, but in the end, love won out, as did the realisation that their descendants would live in eternal poverty if they remained in Triepshi. They thus decided to leave home and thereby divide the family. They invited old Keqi, their brother Merkota who had

settled near Podgorica and the lame Piper to Triepshi for a feast and, when they had all eaten their fill, the two young men took leave of the remaining clan and set off for Peja. They met the two maidens there on the appointed day and followed them to their homes.

One of these maidens was from Redzica. She married the young Vas Keqi, and from their union stemmed the large Vasevich [Vasojevići] tribe that now counts 200 households and 3,000 souls. The Vasojevići follow the Orthodox church and speak Slavic. They are known as inveterate robbers and carry out raids on the neighbouring territories as often as they can. They also ambush Muslim caravans from Gusinje [Gucia], Bijelo Polje and Rožaje. They can be divided into two groups: the upper Vasojevići and the lower Vasojevići depending on whether they live on the eastern or the western side of the mountain range that serves as the divide between the waters that flow into the Mediterranean and those that flow into the Danube basin, as well as the divide between the northwards-flowing Lim and the Morača that flows southwards into Lake Shkodra. The upper Vasojevići inhabit the valley of the Redzica that comes down from the eastern slopes of those mountains and ends at the Lim. The lower Vasojevići inhabit the mountains between the Morača to the west, the Malo Rika [Mala Rijeka] Creek to the north and the wooded Lievo Rika [Lijeva Rijeka] River to the south. It is because of this latter name that they are also called Lijevo Rijekjani. The region of Lijeva Rijeka was long uninhabited but during the Turkish conquest, most of the inhabitants of Redzica withdrew to the other side of the mountains and this region was thereby settled. Those who remained in Redzica became tenant farmers of the Turks. When things settled down, many of the refugees returned in small groups and there are now 40 to 50 households of Lijeva Rijeka in Redzica. On the other side, as mentioned, the descendants of Vas who had emigrated there continued to harass their Muslim neighbours and many of them had to flee. They crossed over the mountains and settled in Lijeva Rijeka. As such, one now finds the original inhabitants mixed in with the later immigrants on both sides of the mountains. However, both parts call themselves Vasojevići.

Turkish rule over the valley of the Redzica was never particularly strong. In times of trouble or whenever the opportunity arose, the inhabitants refused to pay taxes or tribute. Whenever the Turks gained the upper hand, the residents once again declared their submission. The Turks usually found it to their advantage to accept such declarations and forget the past. The Lijevo Rijekjani living on the western side of the mountains, whose district normally forms part of the Montenegrin Brda, have, however, never recognized Turkish rule. Both tribes are now (1850) led by a monk, the Archimandrite Moses, who is said to be an intelligent and cosmopolitan man and who resides at the Monastery of Saint George. This monastery is situated in the valley of the Redzica, about five hours from Bijelo Polje, in a settlement called Hasi.

The other maiden stemmed from a region of Dukagjin between the Drin and Valbona rivers, not far from Jakovo [Gjakova]. She married Kaster Keqi and from their union arose the clan of the Kastravich who speak Albanian and who have mostly converted to Islam.

We now return to the two sons of old Keqi who remained in Triepshi. These were Lazar Keqi and Ban Keqi. Their families and herds prospered to such an extent that the small region they owned was insufficient to sustain them and they could no longer remain together.

Lazar decided to move southwards to the neighbouring region of Hoti, on the other side of the Cem River. They agreed that the river was to be considered the border for the herds of the two brothers. However, something odd happened during the separation which was to become a source of much strife and conflict among their descendants. When Lazar departed with all of his goods, it so happened that on one of the horses he took with him as his property, a saddle remained that belonged to Ban. Lazar was already riding up the southern slope of the river valley when his brother called to him from the northern side to return the saddle. The thought of having to ride all the way back down the mountain and up the other side was too much for Lazar and he called back to his brother saying that, in exchange for the saddle, he would give him the southern side of the valley, that is,

the slope he had just ridden up and that was supposed to belong to him. As such, the Triepshi own this slope, that is to say, they own the whole Cem valley even today.

The Hoti continued to fight over ownership of the land with their northern neighbours, with many open confrontations. In 1849, for instance, the two tribes battled twice for possession of the land. In the first battle, the Hoti suffered two dead and five wounded, and the Triepshi two dead and three wounded, although the Hoti had over 400 warriors and the Triepshi only 80. In the second battle, the Hoti suffered four dead and many wounded, and the Triepshi only one dead and four wounded. But in one battle that was fought many years ago, 20 Hoti and only seven Triepshi fell. The Triepshi attribute their constant military advantage to the fact that they are always on the defensive and lie in protected positions on the northern slope as they await their numerically superior foes. In an attempt to put an end to the eternal conflict, the Hoti offered the Triepshi a golden saddle to replace the saddle of their ancestral father, but the Triepshi have always refused.

From Ban Keqi stemmed the four large Catholic Albanian clans of Triepshi that now make up over 70 families and, together with the original inhabitants of the place, constitute the village of Triepshi that counts 115 households and about 700 souls. The original inhabitants are also Catholic and speak Albanian. Triepshi is a geographically secure site, and its inhabitants are very warlike by nature. They are thus in constant conflict not only with their immediate neighbours but also with the distant Muslim towns of Podgorica and Gucia which they perturb with their frequent incursions. They lie in ambush to attack caravans and kill as many Muslims as they can manage to find.

Lazar Keqi, who had crossed the Cem River, originally took tenure of land from a rich Hoti man. His family grew to such an extent that they were able to oppose the natives in the region and gradually made themselves masters of this arid land. The original inhabitants either emigrated or were driven out such that, in the end, there were only six households of natives and they were in a wretched state.

Of Lazar Keqi's son, Geg Lazari, stems the great clan of the Hoti Gegas. He had four sons: Pjec Gega, Gjon Gega, Laj Gega and Jun [Gjun] Gega.

From Pjec Gega stems the village of Trabojna with 180 households and 1,000 souls. The other three brothers and their descendants formed the village of Arapshi that now has 190 households and 1,150 souls.

With the exception of four families who converted to Islam, the Hoti are all Catholic and all speak Albanian. Both of the villages have their own banners [*bajraks*] and their inhabitants are considered to be the bravest of all these highlanders. The *bajraktar* of Trabojna is even called the leader of all of the highlands of Shkodra, and in Ottoman military formations, his banner is second only to that of Mirdita which is to be found at the extreme right wing, whereas the banner of Hoti is raised on the left wing. On the battlefield he receives thrice the normal rations, a privilege that was granted to an ancestor of his for some great deed and which he inherited.

When the Venetians attacked Dulcigno [Ulqin/Ulcinj], the Pasha of Shkodra hastened to save the town and camped across from the Venetians. One day, when the pasha had given his army a day of rest, the *bajraktar* of Hoti began disputing with another highlander as to who was the bravest. The infuriated Hoti man suddenly seized his banner and, taking the Venetian battery by storm, planted it in amongst the enemy cannons. When the men of Hoti saw their banner moving, they did not want to abandon it and set off on the attack, too. The rest of the army followed and, in this way, the Muslims took the whole battery.⁷⁴

In a census carried out in 1854, the three main settlements in Hoti territory were given as: Hot, the main village at the base of the valley; Rapsha on the pass leading to Kelmendi; and Trabojna, now in Montenegro. Each of these villages formed its own *bajrak*, and was thus militarily independent.

In the late Ottoman period, the Hoti tribe was regarded as the prime *bajrak* of the Malësia e Madhe region and, because of its military prowess, it was accorded the privilege of forming the left wing of the

Ottoman army in every battle. Hecquard stated: 'the Hoti tribe, considered the most important in the pashalik of Shkodra, marches at the head of the four Great Mountain [tribes]'.⁷⁵ Edith Durham referred to it as the 'leader tribe of the Malësia e Madhe'. This reputation and privileged position derived in good part from the martial deeds of a seventeenth-century figure called Ujk Luci who, with the help of men from Gruda, played a decisive role in the Ottoman conquest of Dulcigno in 1696. According to tradition, Ujk Luci was then accorded the privilege of being able to tie his horse up at the entrance to Shkodra market without having to pay the usual market tax. The Muslims of Hoti remembered Ujk Luci as an important ancestor.

The Hoti tribe also played a major role in an attempt to counter the loss of border territory which was accorded to Montenegro by the Congress of Berlin in 1878. From April to July, 1880, under the command of Hodo Pasha Dervishi, also known as Hodo bey Sokoli, about 8,000 volunteers from the Shkodra region, with a good proportion of Hoti men, fought to keep Hoti and Gruda, and in particular the plain of Tuz, south of Podgorica, as part of Ottoman Albania. Their efforts were successful and Hoti remained largely in Albania, although Gruda was later handed over to Montenegro.

At the Conference of London in 1913, the Great Powers then awarded Hoti and Gruda to Montenegro. The two tribes put up much resistance to their inclusion in that country. In mid-June 1913, the heads of the two tribes, under the leadership of Dedë Gjo' Luli, the *vojvoda* of Trabojna, met with the International Border Commission in Shkodra to inform it that they would resist the new border by force of arms. In late July 1913, a group of about 150 Hoti warriors under Dedë Gjo' Luli and Marash Uci visited Vice-Admiral Sir Cecil Burney, the head of the international administration in Shkodra, to convey to him their resolve not to submit to Montenegro. At a second meeting in August of that year, Dedë Gjo' Luli stated: 'We will neither give our tribal land to our enemies nor abandon it. We are all agreed and determined once and for all that we would die rather than give up our land.'⁷⁶ Such statements were, however, to no avail. In mid-April 1914, the Montenegrin government announced its definitive military occupation of Hoti and Gruda. Most of the settlements in Hoti territory were razed to the ground by the Montenegrin commander Martinović. The surviving population, some 700 families from Hoti and Gruda fled to Kastrati

territory around 23 April 1914, and by May many of them had reached Shkodra where they camped out in desperate circumstances. One additional tragedy to this border change was that Hoti lost access to its pastureland on the plains of the Buna (Bojana) River, to which it was wont to drive its flocks for the winter. Some of Hoti was subsequently restored to Albania when the border issue was settled that year, but the Trabojna area of it remained in Montenegro. Some of the tribesmen of Trabojna then emigrated and settled on the plain north of Shkodra, forming the village of Hoti i Ri (New Hoti).

Figures of Note

Dedë Gjo' Luli

The Hoti tribal leader Dedë Gjo' Luli (1840–1915), born of the Dedvukaj family in Trabojna, was perhaps the most famous of all the highland warriors. He resisted Montenegrin incursions into Hoti and Gruda in the years following the League of Prizren and successfully defended Plava and Gucia (1879–80). Dedë Gjo' Luli is, however, remembered primarily for his leadership of the anti-Ottoman uprising in northern Albania in 1911 when the military success of Hoti, Gruda and Kelmendi forced the Young Turk authorities to come to terms with them. It was he who organised the highland assault at the Battle of Dečić (6 April 1911) near Tuz, when the Albanian flag was raised for the first time since 1479. He also led resistance to the incorporation of Hoti and Gruda into Montenegro following the Conference of London in 1913. A highland warrior to the end, Dedë Gjo' Luli was slain by Montenegrin forces near Orosh in Mirdita.

Marash Uci

The highland warrior Marash Uci (d. 1914) stemmed from Rapsha. The poet Gjergj Fishta met him there in 1902. On their many evenings together, the elderly warrior told the young priest of the heroic battles between the Albanian highlanders and the Montenegrins, in particular of the Battle of Rrzhanica Bridge in which Marash Uci had taken part himself. Their meetings proved to be a great inspiration to the poet and for his famed epic poem 'The Highland Lute'. Edith Durham also recalled Marash Uci as the 'hereditary surgeon of the tribe, a singularly charming and intelligent old man', and recorded his

lineage stemming from Gjun Gega. She remembered the tragic circumstances of his death:

Poor Marash, who was one of the best, died of pneumonia during the revolt of the tribes against Turkish rule in 1911. His house and all he owned was burnt. I met him in an exhausted state among the refugees. He smiled and pulled from his breast the two picture postcards I had sent him from London, the only things he had saved from the wreck. I helped him, and he begged me not to give him more than his share. One of the Franciscans gave him shelter, for he was generally beloved, but he did not survive the winter. I mourned him at the time, but was later glad that he had died before his beloved tribe was handed to the enemy.⁷⁷

The Triepshi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Triepshi (or Trieshi) tribal region is situated in Montenegro above the right (northern) bank of the Cem River near the Albanian border. Its territory stretches northeastwards to Mount Milis (Suka e Milisit). Triepshi, known as Zatrijebač in BCS (Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian), borders on the traditional tribal regions of Hoti to the south, Gruda to the southwest, Kelmendi to the east, and on Slavic-speaking regions to the north, being Kuči tribal territory. Some regard Triepshi simply as the Albanian-speaking part of Kuči. The main settlements of Triepshi, all tiny villages, are: Nikmarash [Nikmaraši], Rudina [Rudinje], Muzheçk, Budëz [Budža], Poprat, Stjepoh [Stjepov], Delaj [Djelaj], formerly Bitidosi], Bëkaj [Bjenkoni] and Cem.

Population

The term Triepshi, formerly Triebçi, seems to be related to the Slavic words Trijebač and Zatrijebač. The area was also known as Little Kuči [Alb. Kuçi i Vogël, BCS Mali Kuči, early Ital. Kucci Picoli], as it was often seen as a part of Kuči tribal territory.

Triepshi was mentioned in 1485 in a Turkish register of the Sanjak of Shkodra. Reference was made at that time to the settlements of:

Pantalesh with 110 households, Bardhaj with 25 households, Bonkeqi with 11 households, Bitidosi (Delaj) with 11 households, Broqini with 12 households, Radunje with 55 households, Spani with 24 households, and Lazorce with five households.⁷⁸

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Triepshi consisted of about 100 households. An apostolic report for the period 1717–30 refers to 96 households and 800 (Catholic) inhabitants, and in 1764 there is a reference to 94 houses and 680 inhabitants.⁷⁹

The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2 on his way from Kelmendi to Gruda, reported:

On 17 September 1671, we left Clementi [Kelmendi] for Gruda, which is a good two days' journey from Clementi. In the villages of Triepse [Triepshi], Ledina, Cochie [Kuči?] and Tusa there are 306 homes. They have large families and number 2,500 souls.⁸⁰

In 1866, Emile Wiet, the French consul in Shkodra, noted 111 Catholic households comprising 593 individuals.⁸¹

The Triepshi were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor tribe, and consisted of one *bajrak* that was Catholic in its vast majority. It also claimed pastureland on the left (southern) side of the Cem River that belonged to Hoti, something which resulted in constant quarrels between Triepshi and Hoti.⁸² The right (northern) bank of the Cem was regarded as neutral territory.

Among the noted families of Triepshi are the: Arapaj, Cacaj, Curanaj, Dedivanaj, Dukaj, Gashaj, Gegaj, Gjekaj, Gjeshaj, Gjokaj, Gjonaj, Gjonlekaj, Gjurashaj, Gjuravçaj, Hasanaj, Lekoçaj, Lucaj, Margilaj, Memçaj, Micakaj, Nikollaj, Nikprelaj, Palushaj, Prenkoçaj, Ujkaj and Vataj. The *bajraktars* of Triepshi came primarily from the Lucaj and Ujkaj families.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Like Hoti, the Triepshi tribe derived its origins from a Slav, probably a Bosnian Slav called Keq Preka or Keq Ponti who fled to what is now Piperi territory in Montenegro and settled there either before the Ottoman invasion or around 1520. He had several sons, called Lazar

Keqi, Ban Keqi, Kaster Keqi, Merkota Keqi, Vas or Vash Keqi and Piper Keqi. The second son, Ban Keqi, is considered to be the direct ancestral father of the Triepshi tribe, whereas his brother Lazar Keqi was the ancestor of the Hoti tribe, which is thus related to the Triepshi. Lazar Keqi settled in Trabojna and Ban Keqi settled in Muzheq and was buried in Nikmarash. Some members of the tribe derived their origins from Ivan Crnojević, and the old families of Delaj claimed they stemmed from immigrants from Herzegovina.⁸³

Another version of the legend of the origin of the Triepshi tribe is as follows. Keq Ponti was from Arta, now in Greece. When the Ottoman Turks expanded into the Balkans, he swore that he would never live under Ottoman rule and set off with his family to Nish and then to Dibra. Their wanderings eventually led them to the valley of the Cem River. There, at the fall of night, they saw a light in a cave called Borovçi, which was inhabited by a local native called Bokshin and his three sons. Bokshin received them and allowed them to stay. He told his visitors that he had once had good land along the Cem River, but that a certain Lekash had stolen his property and his livestock. In return for his hospitality, Keq Ponti's son offered to kill the shepherds of Lekash and steal the livestock back. And so it was done. Lekash fled on horseback, losing a sandal on his way, and the sons of Keq Ponti, here called Vasi, Krasi, Lazri, Pipi and Baku, settled in the region called Bregu i Lekashit, and took to herding.⁸⁴

The Montenegrin warrior Marko Miljanov (1833–1901) recounts the legend of an early conflict between the Triepshi and Kastrati tribes.

There is a tale about Albanian blood-feuding from ancient times. It is as follows. When someone's brother or relative is killed, they take blood from the body of the dead man and put it in a glass where they leave it. Revenge is not taken for as long as the blood remains coagulated. But when the blood seethes and spills over the glass, it is a sign that the time has come for revenge to be taken. The blood shows that the time is right and that the murderer has no way out but to pay the price, for fate itself calls for revenge. Among the many events of this kind, I would like to mention only one example of revenge being taken when foaming blood spilled over a glass. This is what happened.

A group of armed Kastrati men attacked the herds and shepherds of Triepshi [Zatrepčani] at Bardhanja [Bardanje] near

the Cem [Cijevna] River. The attack took place at dawn, when daylight emerges from the night. This event happened many years ago, and yet the Kastrati and Triepshi have not been reconciled up to the present day. But I do not intend to recall all the misfortunes that took place between them over the last hundred years, and I am not sure whether this attack was the actual origin of the conflict and all the fighting between them. What I do know is that the blood in the glass seethed and gave rise to a feud, not because of the death of a friend or a blood brother, but because of a child. This is what happened.

During the attack, they stole the animals and slew the shepherds. But there was a little, eight-year-old boy there called Brunçi [Brunči], who was tending his goats, too. They realised that it was not proper for them to kill him because he was too young to bear arms (only a man who himself is able to kill, may be killed). The men decided to leave the boy alone, but when the lad saw his goats on the move, he ran after them and no one noticed him. He journeyed with the herd all night long. At dawn, the attackers noticed him and asked him:

Who are you?

I am the son of Mark Pjetri [Mark Petrov], replied the lad.

But where do you think you are going?

I am looking after my goats.

But we are not from here, poor boy, and we have taken all of the goats. However, we will give you one goat back. Take it with you and go home.

Little Brunçi took one goat, swung it around his neck and departed peacefully, passing by all the armed warriors of Kastrati. They watched the little boy as he happily drove his goat home. He was a good-looking lad and they watched him fondly, not like the killers they were who, but a few hours earlier, had slaughtered and pillaged everything they could find.

But among the attacking force there was a fellow called Cuc Caka, a well-known fighter who, like a wild beast, was watching over the men. When he came upon the little boy with his goat, he stopped him and asked him:

Who are you?

I am the son of Mark Pjetri, replied the lad.

The warrior drew his sabre from his belt and brandished it in front of the boy.

I am going to slice off your head.

The boy showed no fear and replied bravely: 'You wouldn't dare!'

I wouldn't dare because of whom?

Because of my brother, Prela [Pranlja].

Hearing this response, the warrior went berserk and, in one fell swoop, he sliced off the head of little Brunçi. All the other warriors spit and cursed him for the crime he committed against a little boy who had not yet reached the age to bear arms and go to war.

When Mark, the father of little Brunçi, found the headless body of his son, he gathered what he could of the boy's blood and put it in a glass. There it remained for several years until, one day, it began to seethe and foam, and spilled over the glass. When he saw the blood seething, Mark grabbed his sabre and went out to the threshing floor above his home. Brandishing his sabre, he ran back and forth across it. The wives of his three sons, who were fetching wood, laughed at him when they saw him running around on the threshing floor and said to one another on their way home: 'Father has gone crazy!'

Mark returned to his house and informed his sons that little Brunçi's blood had begun to seethe, and that it was time to take revenge.

I am an old man now and can no longer use my sabre. I realised on the threshing floor now that I am unable to carry out the deed. But you are still young and unskilled. You don't know the roads of Kastrati, yet I think you could easily take revenge without any great loss of life. From the foaming blood, it is clear that the time has come for the murderer to pay for his crime.

On hearing the words of the old man, the sons' wives were ashamed that they had laughed at him.

The sons replied to him, saying: 'Since we do not know the roads and you are not able to carry out the deed, we will take you and carry you wherever you want to go so that you can tell us what to do. You just tell us where you want to go. Once you have told us what to do, we will bring you home and then

go out and find that Cuc Caka, and take revenge for the death of little Brunçi.'

As such, the three sons, Prela, Dreshk [Dreško] and Gjon [Đon], carried old Mark up into the mountains of Kastrati, to a high peak from where they could see everything they needed to see so that he could give them instructions. There was a cavern nearby with two entrances and in it were 30 shepherds and over 1,000 head of livestock, small and large. When they got back home, they asked Mark about everything they had seen. He told them the following:

The three of you alone will not be able to overcome Cuc and the thirty shepherds in the cavern. You must go first to Lalë Drekalë [Lal Drekalov] who will give you three hundred Kuči warriors to attack and take the cavern. Leave me right here. I will not move from the spot until I hear that you have slain Cuc and all of his men and cut them to pieces. Just bring me some bread and water so that I do not die of hunger or thirst while awaiting your return.

The three brothers set off and returned eight days later with the 300 men of Kuči. They then asked Mark how they should attack the cavern, and he replied:

The cavern has two entrances, a large one and a small one. At the large entrance you will find the thirty shepherds, and at the small entrance you will find Cuc and his two companions. Therefore, the two strongest of you must attack the small entrance. When you kill Cuc Caka, his two companions will be confused and frightened and will run towards the large entrance. At that moment, the three hundred of you must attack.

They then said to old Mark: 'We do not know which ones of us are strong enough to attack the small entrance.'

Mark responded: 'Come over here and I will tell you which of you are the strongest.'

He began to poke his fingers in their bellies and after he had poked at all of them, he said to his son, Prela: 'You are the strongest. You take over the small entrance.'

He then said to another Triepshi warrior whose belly he had poked: 'You, too, are strong enough for the small entrance.'

And so, all of them went off to where they were told. Prela approached the small entrance when he got to the cavern. There he

espied Cuc and the two other men who were lying in the cavern singing. The closer he got, the clearer their voices became. Prela and his companion listened to what they were singing. The song ended with these words:

Do not slay me, Prela Marko,
By the Lord and by Saint John, no!

At that moment, Prela attacked, shouting: 'Saint John will not help you this time, just as he did not help our little Brunçi to escape from you and your sabre when you slew him.' The other two men ran towards the large entrance but they were all killed.

The livestock was seized and taken back to Kuči, and old Mark received them with great satisfaction, not only for the booty and the 30 men of Kastrati who were slain, but for the death of Cuc and for the capture of his sabre that was very famous by that time. This was the sabre he had used to slay little Brunçi and it was now safely in the belt of his son Prela.

Revenge had thus been taken. The booty was distributed and the sabre of Cuc was handed over to old Mark, who kept it in memory of the deed.⁸⁵

Triepshi is remembered for its resistance to Ottoman incursions in the region, in particular in 1717 when they killed 62 Turkish soldiers. Turkish forces are said to have withdrawn after this disaster and left the region in peace until 1862. At this time, at least for tactical reasons, Triepshi had good relations not only with the Kuči tribe but also with the Petrović-Njegoš dynasty, the rulers of Montenegro, especially with Prince Petar II (reg. 1830–51), Prince Danilo (reg. 1852–60), and Prince Nikola (reg. 1860–1918). The tribesmen often went to Cetinje to bring the prince the heads of Turks that they had cut off in battle, and so to receive compensation and presents.

Triepshi was annexed to Montenegro in 1878 at the time of the Congress of Berlin, but the border remained vague for quite a while. Some of the Triepshi tribe fled to Ottoman Albania whereas others stayed in what was now Montenegro. A noted figure of Triepshi in this period was Marash Marku Gjelošhaj (1825–1902) who was appointed as a captain (*kapedan*) of Triepshi by the Petrović-Njegoš dynasty. He described his situation as follows:

In Ottoman times I was a Turkish *voyvoda*. Now that we are Montenegrins, I have become captain of Montenegro. Half of the population of Triepshi fled across the Cem River when Triepshi was attached to Montenegro. From there they come back over and work their fields. Those who accepted Montenegrin rule look upon them as enemies. Since the border has not yet been defined in this area, they hope that Triepshi will be returned to Turkey and, if that happens, we will be punished for having accepted Montenegrin rule. Of course as a Montenegrin captain, I will be punished more than the rest so I am not sure whether I should welcome the delineation of the border with a cross on my forehead.⁸⁶

Triepshi, impoverished at the best of times, was caught up in the highland uprising of 1911 and suffered terribly. Edith Durham passed through the area in October of that year:

I dreaded going up to the mountains, as, owing to illness, I had not ridden for three years. But on June 10, in answer to an urgent appeal, I decided to start for Triepshi. Sokol Batzi's son undertook to find me a horse, and under the white mulberry-trees I saw a tall grey stallion, Sokol's own horse, awaiting me – a beautiful beast, he said; far too beautiful, thought I, for a middle-aged female who is completely out of practice. I clambered with great difficulty on top of it; it waltzed playfully round, and began to sidle up the street. At that very moment came a telegram from old Sokol to say he was arriving and the stallion was to be ready for him. His son was overwhelmed with shame and apologies. An Albanian's promise is a promise. I dismounted joyfully, however, and went off happy on a less valuable animal.

The Triepshi tribe is Catholic Albanian, and was annexed by Montenegro after the war of 1877. But no road has yet been made into the territory. We rode up a mountain-side, and struck a rough mule-track. It was to be adapted for mountain-guns as fast as possible. Wretched sheep and goats were hobbling on swollen hoofs, and rolling over, gasping and dying, on either side the way. The flocks saved by the refugees from the Turks were smitten with foot-and-mouth disease. Suddenly round a rocky corner came the heavy

reek of stale blood and carbolic, and four wounded, swaying painfully in their saddles, passed on their way to Podgoritza. A man with them shouted there was bad news. [...] At Triepshi reigned black despair. [...] With Cattapani I went early round the refugees, dealing out bread and money. The irregular way in which maize was given out still caused much suffering. The Triepshi people, on whom they were quartered, suffered, too, greatly, for two extra families were often crowded into a one-roomed hut. And the Triepshi folk, being Albanian, and in many cases related by marriage to the refugees, gave, too, liberally of their small means to the destitute.⁸⁷

Figures of Note

Nikolla bey Ivanaj

Publisher and nationalist figure, Nikolla bey Ivanaj (1879–1951), cousin of Mirash Ivanaj, was born of the Triepshi tribe in the present Albanian–Montenegrin border region and grew up in Podgorica in Montenegro. He is said to have studied in Belgrade, Vienna, Zagreb and Dalmatia and held various positions as a civil servant in Serbia, including that of secretary and interpreter (dragoman) at the Serbian foreign ministry. Ivanaj is remembered as editor-in-chief of the weekly newspaper *Shpnesa e Shcypeniis* (*The Hope of Albania*), published from 1905 to 1908 in Albanian, Italian and BCS (Serbo-Croatian). This periodical, which was important in diffusing the ideals of independence and Albanian-language schooling throughout the Balkans, appeared initially in Dubrovnik, later in Trieste and, finally, in Rome. After Albanian independence, Ivanaj published the Shkodra weekly newspaper *Lidhja kombëtare* (National League) in 1915 in defence of Albanian self-government and national rights. In 1919, he attended the Paris Peace Conference and returned to Albania to found and publish the biweekly newspaper *Koha e re* (*New Age*) in 1919 and 1925, and the weekly *Republika* (*The Republic*) from 1923 to 1925, both in Shkodra. During World War II, he published an autobiographical *Historija e Shqipëniës së ré: vuejtjet e veprimet e mija, pjesa e parë* (*History of Modern Albania: My Sufferings and Activities, Part I*), Tirana 1943; and *Historija e Shqipëniës së ré, pjesa e II-të* (*History of Modern Albanian, Part II*), Tirana 1945, which dealt

in particular with the role of the Catholic clergy; as well as a volume of verse in Tirana, where he died.

Mirash Ivanaj

Mirash Ivanaj (1891–1953) born in Podgorica as a scion of the Triepshi tribe, was a noted political figure of the Zogist period. He graduated from secondary school in Belgrade in 1912 and set off for Italy the following year to study in Rome where he completed two doctorates, one in law and one in literature. Though he was of a Catholic family, he was himself anticlerical and a Freemason of the Grand Orient. On his return to Albania in 1923, he assisted in the publication of his cousin Nikolla bey Ivanaj's weekly anticlerical newspaper *Republika* (*The Republic*). He fled to Yugoslavia in May 1924 and, upon his return in late December of that year, worked as the principal of a secondary school in Shkodra (1928) and later taught in Tirana (1931). From 1932 onwards he was a member of parliament and, on 12 January 1933, he was appointed minister of education, succeeding the deceased Hilë Mosi (1885–1933), a post Ivanaj held for two and a half years. It was during his time as minister, on 6 February 1934, that he cut off Enver Hoxha's scholarship in France when the latter failed to pass his exams. Mirash Ivanaj is remembered primarily for having attempted to nationalise the school system in Albania, but his efforts were opposed by Italy and especially by Greece because of the particular interests of the Greek minority in southern Albania. Greece won a court case against Albania on the matter at the International Court of Justice in The Hague on 6 April 1935, and Ivanaj, as a result, resigned from his post on 30 August of that year. On 7 April 1939, during the Italian invasion, Ivanaj fled to Greece and spent the early war years in Constantinople. He later travelled to the Lebanon, Egypt and Jerusalem in search of work. In September 1945, having received a guarantee from the new communist government, he returned to Albania, one of the few intellectuals to do so, and began teaching at a school of education in Tirana in November of that year. His return, alas, coincided with the zenith of the witch hunts against intellectuals carried out by Koçi Xoxe (1911–49). Despite the guarantee of impunity he had received, Ivanaj was arrested on 15 May 1947 and, after much mistreatment and torture, was sentenced to seven years in prison. He worked in prison as a translator, but died 12 days before he was set to be released. Mirash Ivanaj was the author of a volume of poetry and a play, both unpublished.

The Kastrati Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Kastrati tribal region⁸⁸ is situated in the District of Malësia e Madhe of northern Albania, east and northeast of the town of Bajza on the eastern bank of Lake Shkodra. It stretches from Bajza in the west up to Mount Veleçik (1,725 m.) in the east. To the north, Kastrati territory borders on the valley of Hoti, and to the south on the Proni i thatë (Dry Creek) valley in Shkreli territory. It thus borders on the traditional tribal regions of Hoti to the north, Kelmendi to the northeast, and Shkreli and the Koplik region to the south. Kastrati traditionally had access to Lake Shkodra, which formed its western border. The main settlements of Kastrati are: Aliaj, Ivanaj, Vukpalaj-Bajza, Jaran and Gradec. The administrative centre of the tribal region is Bajza (Vukpalaj-Bajza).

Population

The name of this tribe was recorded as *Kastrati* in a land register in 1416, where it consisted of seven houses. In his 'Report and Description of the Sanjak of Shkodra in 1614', Mariano Bolizza of Kotor uses the form *Castratti*. The Albanian bishop of Sappa and Sarda, Pjetër Budi, also recorded the form *Castrati* in a report sent to Rome in September 1621, and another Albanian bishop of Sappa and Sarda, Frang Bardhi (Francesco Bianchi), referred to *Castrati* in a report to the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in Rome in 1635. The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, mentioned a visit to the church of Saint Mark in the land of *Castratti* in 1671. The name appears as *Castrati* on the maps of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli in 1688 and 1691, and as *Kastrati* on the map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola.

The toponym is said to be related to Lat. *castrum* 'Roman camp', although there is no real evidence to back this up.

The Kastrati were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of one *bajrak*.

The majority of the Kastrati are Catholics, but there are also some Muslims. The Catholic parish was founded in 1678 and a church was built there in 1726 when the registry of births and deaths began. A new church and parsonage were constructed with Austro-Hungarian money in 1901.⁸⁹ The Catholics of Kastrati celebrated the feast of Saint Mark.

Mariano Bolizza referred to Kastrati in 1614 as having 50 households and 130 men in arms, commanded by one Prenk Bitti.⁹⁰ In 1634, Kastrati consisted of 60 houses and 660 inhabitants. The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported:

On the 10 September 1671, we left Riolo [Rrjoll] and arrived in the land of Castratti [Kastrati], 18 miles from Riolo. Here there are 75 homes and 660 souls. There is a roofless church here dedicated to Saint Mark. It is in need of repairs that would cost 50 *scudi*. It also needs a set of vestments. It is under the care of Riolo, but since it is quite a distance away and there is only one parish priest, he cannot pay sufficient attention to the needs of the people there. Most of them die without receiving the sacraments and are buried without cross and candle.⁹¹

In 1838, the Austro-Hungarian physician Joseph Müller was informed by a Pater Deda of Vukël that there were 2,800 inhabitants in Kastrati.⁹² At about the same time, in his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains,' Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gave the population of Kastrati as 2,400, of whom 600 were men in arms.⁹³ In 1866, Emile Wiet, the French consul in Shkodra, noted 153 Catholic households comprising 1,001 individuals.⁹⁴

It may be assumed that the Kastrati tribe had a population of some 2,000 to 3,000 in the late-nineteenth century. In 1897, they consisted of 450 houses and 3,700 inhabitants. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Edith Durham spoke of Kastrati as one *bajrak* of 500 houses.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Kastrati tribe were given as follows: 516 households with a total of 3,280 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Bajza-Ivanaj, Bratosh, Budisha, Goraj, Rranxa e Veshit, Vukpalaj and Vukpalaj i siperm.⁹⁵

In 1938, 2,700 inhabitants were recorded, with 550–950 men in arms.⁹⁶

Families of Kastrati tribemen settled with time in Kosovo where the family name is common. They are to be found notably in Peja and Gjakova, in the village of Karaçeva in Kamenica, and in the Gjilan region.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The origin of the Kastrati tribe is well recounted by Baron Nopcsa who gathered information about them in 1907. According to what he wrote, the Kastrati trace their origin from a figure called Dedli (also spelled Detli, Dedali, Detal, Detali) who lived at the end of the sixteenth century. He was originally from Drekalović in Kuči land in southeastern Montenegro and, as such, the Kastrati regard themselves as related to the Kuči. The Kastrati region was inhabited at that time by the so-called 'ancient Kastrati' (*Kastrati i moçëm*), consisting of the Totović, Petrović and Pelović families of Slavic origin. This Petrović family of Kastrati is said to be related to the Petrović dynasty of the princes of Montenegro.

Dedli had two wives and six sons, of whom three were called Pal, Gor and Jer, names that correspond to the toponyms of Palaj, Goraj and Jaran in the Kastrati region. Dedli and his sons lived in a cave known as the Cave of the Flocks (*Shpella e bagtive*) on Mount Veleçik, an hour from the settlement of Petrović, and originally had good relations with the native population. However, as his family increased in size and he became more prosperous, the natives grew jealous. An old man among the natives advised the families to leave the rivalry to divine providence and suggested that they invite Dedli to dinner and test him. They were to give Dedli a seat far from the dinner table and see how he reacted. Dedli and his six sons were thus invited over, but were not given a seat directly at the table. The six sons then politely escorted their father to a place at the table and served him as tradition would have it. The eldest of the ancient Kastrati was impressed by their good upbringing and expressed the wish to be the godfather of Dedli's grandson by cutting the child's hair for the first time. Peace had been made. Another version of the legend had it that if the sons moved up to the table, it would be a sign that they were submissive, but, instead, the sons drew the table to themselves and began to eat, ignoring their hosts. On seeing this, most of the ancient Kastrati fled the village.⁹⁷

Johann Georg von Hahn heard the legend of the founding of the Kastrati tribe from a Father Gabriel in Shkodra in 1850. He called the ancestral father of the Kastrati Detal Bratoshi and recounted the saga as follows:

Legend has preserved the name of the ancestral father of the Kastrati. He was called Detal Bratoshi. It is not known whether he was an Albanian or a Slav but legend has it that he came to the area

which his descendants now inhabit, from Kuči, a Slavic region. He emigrated with his seven sons, but no reason such as murder or destitution has ever been given. The sons were called: Ivan Detali, Pal Detali, Nar or Ndoc Detali, Gor Detali, Jer Detali, Gjon Detali and Ali Detali. They initially took up residence in a cave on Mount Veleçik that is now called the Sheep Cave (*Shpella e dhenvet*) and was situated one hour from the home of the native Pjetrovic. They lived in that cave for seven years. Since both their families and their herds grew tremendously in numbers, the native population began to look upon them with fear and concern for their own future. One day, they assembled the whole tribe consisting of three clans, the Pjetrovic, the Tutovic and the Pelaj, and discussed what should be done with the new cave dwellers. Some thought they should be invited over and made brothers. Others thought they should be attacked and slain. While they were arguing about a strategy, without reaching a conclusion, an aged man, one hundred years old, arose in their midst and spoke as follows:

My dear friends, I am an old man and I have gained much experience in life. Listen to what I have to say so that an ill-conceived resolution does not do you harm. If it is God's will that brought these people to us, you cannot oppose them for they will destroy you all. However, if it is not God's will, they will flee from you like the clouds in the sky. To find out which it is, prepare a feast and invite the foreigners to partake of it. When everyone is assembled for dinner, place the table so far away from them that they cannot reach the food from where they are sitting. Then pay attention to what they do. If they get up and go over and sit at the table, you will know that they are submissive and will be your slaves. If, however, they get up and draw the table over to where they were sitting so that you are then too far away, pack up your possessions and flee in the night, because they will otherwise rob and enslave you.

The assembly agreed to act as the old man had told them. Detal was invited over and arrived with his seven young, strong sons, who all made a warlike and haughty impression. According to custom, a calf was roasted and placed on the table, the edge of which the invited guests could not even reach with their fingertips. When they understood what was going on, they frowned because they believed

the natives were making fun of them. Visibly annoyed, they rose to their feet, seized the dining table and drew it over to them, leaving their hosts too far away, and proceeded to enjoy their meal.

Fate had spoken out against the natives and they fled that very night, taking their kith and kin with them and leaving only the old and weak behind them, those who would not have survived the journey. When Detal learned that the natives had fled, he left the cave with his children and went down and took over their houses and fields. The tribe he founded still owns that land to this very day. [. . .]

His sons took the best fields for themselves and left the rest to the remaining original inhabitants as they deemed fit. In this manner, although originally poor refugees, they came to form the main stock of the population.

Having lived a long life and having seen his family grow with many grandsons and great-grandsons and all the property they needed, Detal died. His grave is to be found in a small field and is covered with a cairn of rocks.

Detal's sons remained in their new settlement for some time after his death. Since it was, however, a long and difficult way to their fields, they decided to settle in the old village to make life easier. They also hoped with time to acquire the region of Budisha where some of the inhabitants of Triepshi owned vineyards. The rest of that region lay fallow because of a lack of labourers. The settlement was largely abandoned because the Turks had carried off and enslaved all of the inhabitants. As such, they managed to extend their land right to the borders of Hoti, Shkreli and Budisha.

The tribe soon grew in numbers such that they could no longer all live together. They therefore built several new houses that were not far from one another. They also divided the land into three parts and drew lots to apportion it among their families. The southern part of the land was thus taken over by Ali, Gor and Jer, the northern part by Pal and Ndok, the middle by Ivan, Kaça and Leka, and the eastern part was left to the original inhabitants. The way they divided the land up has remained to this very day, each clan and assembly with its own property. Although they grew in numbers, they remained in these settlements. Only Ali, who was a shepherd and was wont to spend the wintertime on the plain,

preferred the warmth and fertility of the lowland regions. Leaving only a few family members in the mountains, he settled on the plain with the rest. They still live there and form the main branch of the Kastrati tribe, although they are all Muslims.

The vineyards of Budisha belonged for a long time to the Benkani [Benka] of Triepshi. They were one of the clans of Triepshi and consisted of 25 families. However, they came from a settlement in Montenegro called Rijeka Ivan Beka. Because of a blood feud, their ancestors had fled to Triepshi where they swiftly prospered. They were all brave people and were much respected by the beys of Shkodra. One of their leaders had distinguished himself particularly and gained favour with the pasha. On behalf of his clan, he asked for and was granted the abandoned vineyards of Budisha that stretch for about three-quarters of an hour up the valley at the foot of Mount Veleçik. Initially, the Benkani came over from Triepshi to work the land and harvest the grapes, but as the Detali clan grew in number, the Benkani decided it was easier to give them the vineyards in tenure and receive half of the harvest in compensation, or one-tenth as others say. The Detali thus paid tribute to the Benkani for many years. In the end, a conflict broke out among them that led to the Benkani losing the vineyards. This happened in the following manner.

One of Pal Detali's sons called Vuk Pala had many sons of his own, among whom were Ull Vuka, Kat Vuka and Ded Vuka. No man in the region equalled them in size and strength.

One day, Kat and Ded went over to Triepshi to call the Benkani to come and harvest the ripe grapes. There, they learned that two of the dogs in the house of the chief of the Benkani were called Kat and Ded. They were so infuriated at this that they drew their knives, slew the dogs and returned home. When they got back, they told their brothers about the insult, i.e. that the Benkani had named their dogs after the Kastrati, and that they had slain the beasts. In retaliation, they decided to stop paying the Benkani the tribute they owed them. Accordingly, they harvested the grapes alone, without waiting for the Benkani. When the Benkani heard what had happened, they assembled a corps of men from Triepshi and Kuçi and carried out a raid on the Detali herds that were grazing up on Mount Veleçik. They surrounded the pen at night and attacked at

dawn, but the four shepherds who had been posted there fought back until three of them were killed. The fourth one managed to escape and sound the alarm, but the attackers plundered the pen and herded the animals away.

Ull Vuka was busy putting on his sandals when he heard the alarm call early in the morning. Without delay, and still without one sandal, he set off in a rush. Others joined him with such speed that they caught up with their foes at the crossing of the Cem River.

The Triepshi were driven back and lost four men on site. The Detali men chopped their heads off and stuck them on poles, returning home triumphantly with their retrieved herds. From that time on, they paid no more tribute and divided the valley of Budisha among themselves. One half was given to the Ivanaj and the other half to the Goraj, who now bear the name Budishaj.

The descendants of the Detali subsequently grew in power such that their neighbours feared them. They carried on with their raids and incursions that caused wars with the other tribes, the Shkreli, then the Hoti, and then the Kopliku, etc. They were even in conflict with the pashas of Shkodra, but always won out when the pashas sent troops against them. The pashas finally decided that it was best to cater to the chiefs of Kastrati with gifts and good treatment and thereby preserve peace. This turned out to be the best strategy because the Kastrati were quiet for quite some time, and even paid some tribute, a few paras per house.

Finally, a certain Tahir Bey of the great Chaushen family became Pasha of Shkodra. He planned to make the Christian Kastrati equal to all the other *rayah* [non-Muslims]. They were to pay *baraç* [the head tax] and submit to the legal authority of the *kadi* [Muslim judge] like the people living in and around the town. The men of Veleçik were not too happy about this. They considered the blood that flowed in their veins and resumed their raids and incursions once again. The pasha then mustered a large army that set off for Kastrati land. The Detali realised that they could not match the superior numbers of the pasha's army and took their women, children, livestock and other possessions back up to the cave where their ancestors had once lived. Only a couple of old people remained in the village. They were too feeble to be harmed by the pasha's soldiers.

Ull Vuka, Detal's great-grandson, was now chief of the mountain tribe. When the pasha discovered that the village had been left abandoned and heard that the inhabitants had fled into the mountains, he sent his men in their pursuit, not knowing how difficult the terrain was. The pasha himself stayed at the house of Ull Vuka. The attackers soon encountered fierce resistance. They were subjected not only to the tribe's projectiles, but also to boulders and tree trunks that were hurled down the mountainside at them by the women and children. These resulted in many casualties. Ull Vuka observed the assault from his doorstep and, seized by fear, called upon Saint Mark for assistance, promising to build him a church and celebrate his feast day if the saint would help the men of Kastrati achieve victory. The battle then turned in their favour. When the pasha, who was staying with him, asked him who was winning, he replied: 'Your men, pasha, for they are well equipped. My men are naked and have nothing.' The pasha sent him outside to observe the fighting again and, when Ull saw the Turks fleeing for their lives and his own men shouting and pursuing them, he went back inside and cried: 'It has been done! It has been done!' The pasha asked: 'What has been done? Who won?' Ull Vuka replied: 'Now you will see!' and thrust a dagger into the pasha's heart. Even today, people will show you where the pasha was buried.

Turkish troops prevailed no longer. The Detali pursued them to the so-called Dry Creek (Përroi i thatë) and from then on, the bed of the river became their border. Those living on one side of it pay taxes like all the other people and submit to the authority of the *kadi*. Those on the other side live according to the laws of the mountains and only recognise the pasha.

The church that Ull Vuka promised to Saint Mark during the battle was built and his feast day is still held and honoured by the Detali.

Fighting with Shkodra continued until a more reasonable pasha took over and gave the Kastrati back their old privileges. Since that time there has been peace between them and Shkodra.

When they grew in numbers and the region where they lived could no longer support them, they began following Ali's example, who upon the death of his father had moved to the plain of Bajza between the Dry Creek and the lake. Since the land here belonged to

the beys and aghas of Shkodra, they leased it and initially only built a few simple huts on it where they spent the winter. In the summer they returned to their mountains where the climate was healthier. Gradually, however, the families on the plain sold their land in the mountains and, in return, bought the properties that they had earlier leased. And so it came about that more Detali now live on the plain, which they now own almost entirely, than in the mountains.⁹⁸

In another legend, Dedli (alias Detal) sent his wife and daughter-in-law to visit the ancient Kastrati. When the women returned home the next day, they informed Dedli that the godfather had attempted to commit adultery with them. Dedli was infuriated and swore revenge, promising to build a church in honour of Saint Mark if the saint would help him. The ancient Kastrati were overcome and defeated in a subsequent battle. After the fighting, Dedli's sons washed their swords in the springs and creeks of the region, polluting the mountain water with blood, which caused the springs and creeks to dry up forever. As such, Kastrati is an arid land.

In yet another version of the legend of origin, Dedli is said to have fought and defeated the ancient Kastrati at Gradec. There he met Bushatlli, the Pasha of Shkodra, and, recognising the latter to be a man of substantial power, he submitted and placed himself and his sons in the pasha's protection. In return, the pasha offered him as much land as he could ride over in one day. Dedli mounted his horse at Qafa e Malthit and rode around to Qafa e Stares, Qafa e Çingens, Bardhaj, Kapa e Brojë, Rranxa e Vrithit, Gryka e Shtinit near Goraj and back to Gradec. His horse collapsed at the Proni i thatë (Dry Creek) where Dedli planted his sword in the soil to show that he would hereafter defend his land from any foes. Kastrati land now had recognized borders, and Dedli paid tribute to the Pasha of Shkodra, as he had promised. Saint Mark also received his church and became patron saint of the Kastrati.⁹⁹ Dedli is said to be buried in the Cave of the Flocks (*Shpella e bagtive*) in Kastrati.

A Shkreli legend recounts the founding of Kastrati territory differently. It tells that an ancestor of the Kastrati once caught an owl, and a Shkreli man took such delight in the bird that, to have it, he gave the Kastrati the whole of Mount Velegik, which had previously belonged to the Shkreli.¹⁰⁰

What we do know from their history is that the tribal leaders of Kastrati gathered for their assemblies in Bajza at the Shpella e Frashnit cave. These assemblies usually brought together the *bajraktar*, four chiefs (*krena*), 24 elders and one man from each house to discuss tribal affairs.

Travel Impressions

The Bosnian Croatian priest, Lovro Mihačević (1856–1920), who held a position as provincial of the new Franciscan province of Shkodra, toured Kastrati in 1907:

The next day we set off for Kastrati. The trail was stony and steep enough to break your neck. From the summit we had a wonderful view of Kastrati, Mount Veleçik, peaceful, shimmering Lake Shkodra and its verdant surroundings. Far to the west was Montenegro with its towns Virpazar, Rijeka Crnojevića, Podgorica and Žabljak. Under white-haired Mount Veleçik was the village of Kastrati before us with its church and parsonage. The trail continued through crags, rocks and boulders such that we had to pay more attention to the horses than to ourselves because horses with broken legs were no rarity here. The Kastrati are kind and gentle people, humble and pious. They are proud but not conceited, poor but not hapless. And they love to sing heroic songs with their *labutas*.¹⁰¹

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Kastrati, which she visited in May 1908:

Having finished our scrambled eggs and fried slices of sheep cheese, we set out again for Bratoshi in Kastrati Sypermi (Upper Kastrati) and soon entered Kastrati land.

The track wound up a mountain-side of bare grey rocks. The horses, sorry beasts at best, were wearied out and the rest of the way had to be tramped. Down below lay, like a garden, the fertile plain of Lower Kastrati, and Scutari Lake blazed silver in the afternoon light. It was *aksbam*, past—we had been thirteen hours on the way—when we finally came to the church of Bratoshi.

The young Franciscan in charge made us very welcome, and his charming old mother bustled round to make ready supper [...]

Kastrati consists of one bariak of five hundred houses and, as do all tribes, has a definite tale of origin. It traces descent from the famous fighting stock, Drekalovich of Kuchi, which in turn derives from Berisha, by tradition one of the oldest of all Albanian tribes. Kuchi, since the war of '76-'77, has been included politically within the Montenegrin frontier. Actually, it first threw in its lot with Montenegro in 1835, but—together with Piperi, another tribe of at any rate partially Albanian blood—revolted in 1845 when Prince Danilo tried to make them pay taxes. The rising was suppressed, but Kuchi revolted again later. Montenegro owes the subsequent acquisition of the territory to the heroism and military skill of Marko Drekalovich, who with his tribe, after harrying the Turks of Podgoritzza for many years, sick of Turkish rule, joined forces with Prince Nikola when war against the Turks was proclaimed. He lies buried on the heights of Medun, the Turkish stronghold which he captured after a heavy siege, and his name is famous alike in Albania and Montenegro.

The Kuchi are now largely (entirely?) Serbophone and Orthodox. When they became so I do not know.

From Drekalovich, then, 'a long while ago' came one Delti with his seven sons to the land of Kastrati. They fought the people they found there, said to be Serbs, beat them, took land and settled. And from Delti and his seven sons descend three hundred houses of Kastrati. The remaining two hundred are of mixed origin; some, doubtless with truth, are said to derive from the conquered Serbs. They are all now Catholic or Moslem, and Albanophone but Serb names, notably Popovich, show they have not always been so.

The nearest approach to a date that I obtained was that the Church of Gruda was the oldest in Maltsia e madhe, and was 380 years old, and that the Church of Bratoshi Kastrati—third oldest—was built soon after the Delti settled. This definite statement, that the Delti arrived less than 380 years ago, is of much interest, as in spite of the Skenderbeg story in the land, it makes their arrival subsequent to Skenderbeg's death (1467).¹⁰²

The Boga Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Boga tribal region is situated in the upper valley of the Proni i thatë (Dry Creek) in the District of Malësia e Madhe in northern Albania. It makes up the uppermost part of the valley on the road from Koplik leading over the mountains to Theth, in Shala territory. It is now part of the Municipality of Shkrel. Boga borders on the traditional tribal regions of Kelmendi to the north, Kastrati to the west, Shala to the east, and Shkreli, Gimaj, and Plani to the south. The main settlement of the small tribe is the village of Boga, which is situated at 950 m. in altitude.

Population

The term Boga occurs both on the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli and on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola as *Bogu*. The Slavic form *Bogic* also occurs in this period, and the tribal designation would seem to be of Slavic origin.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Boga tribe were given as follows: 34 households with a total of 228 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Kolaj and Preçaj.¹⁰³

The Boga tribe was and is Catholic. It celebrates the feast of Saint Michael on 29 September, by the slaughtering and roasting of sheep on a spit.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The small *bajrak* of Boga was closely related to the Kelmendi tribe, from which it stemmed, and had a population of about 700 in the late nineteenth century. Their legendary ancestor is said to have been the second son of Kelmend, the founder of the Kelmendi tribe.

Living as they do to the south of the Kelmendi region, but on the other side of a high mountain range, the Boga actually had closer contacts with Shkreli and Shala, but it was to the powerful Kelmendi that they turned for protection and were always affiliated with them. Around 1897, they joined Kelmendi as its fourth *bajrak*. The alliance with distant Kelmendi rather than with nearby Shkreli and Shala enabled

the Boga tribe to preserve a good degree of autonomy within Kelmendi and independence from their immediate neighbours.

Karl Steinmetz, who passed through Boga on his way to the Shala valley in 1904, left the following note of the tribe:

The Boga actually belong to the Kelmendi tribe and constitute one of its four *bajraks*. In actual fact, they have very little contact with the Kelmendi because the latter live in the valley of the Cem, from which the Boga are separated by a 2,000 m. high mountain range. The Boga are made up of about 75 families that, with one exception, are all Catholic and live in the following nine villages: Gjokaj, Preçaj, Malej, Gegaj, Mihaj, Leshaj, Mikaj, Ulgjekaj and Nrej. The *bajraktar*, Llesh Sokoli, does not live on tribal territory but on the plain of Shkodra and only visits Boga for a couple of weeks each year. The rest of the time he is represented by Zejf Prenka. The Boga, too, are primarily herdsmen because there is very little farmland, only around Preçaj.¹⁰⁴

Baron Nopcsa, who collected data on the tribes of the region in about 1907, notes that the Boga were considered descendants of the Kelmendi.

They spoke very openly on all occasions about their blood ties to this famous tribe. But this is not entirely right. It is true that Boga is now the fourth *bajrak* of the Kelmendi tribe. [...] But this small tribe, that does not enjoy any particular prestige and who look physically different from the Kelmendi, paid for the right to call themselves Kelmendi and for protection from that powerful tribe. The payment consisted of 600 oka (720 kilos) of butter which they delivered collectively to Kelmendi. The Boga deny this, of course, but in Kelmendi one quite often hears the sentence: 'Boga supplied Kelmendi with butter' (*Boga ka bâ Klmen me tlyen*).¹⁰⁵

The Boga tribe lived primarily from their herds, which grazed on the rich mountain pastureland in the summer. In the winter period, they drove their animals as far as the region of Mamurras, south of Lezha, where the men were also involved in the lumber trade, cutting down the then dense forests of the area.

The Shkreli Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Shkreli tribal region is situated in the upper valley of the Proni i thatë (Dry Creek) in the District of Malësia e Madhe in northern Albania. The valley of the Proni i thatë descends from the mountains in a northeast to southwestern direction and widens onto the plain north of Shkodra near Koplik. Shkreli land borders on the traditional tribal regions of Kastrati to the northwest, and Boga and Plani to the east. On the southern side of the valley in Lohja. The main settlements of Shkreli are Bzheta (Bërzheta), Dedaj, Vriith and Zagora. Vriith was regarded as its traditional centre.

Population

The term Shkreli was recorded in a Venetian land register in 1416. In 1614, the Venetian writer Mariano Bolizza of Kotor noted the forms *Scarglieli* and *Scarglia*. The bishop of Sappa and Sarda, Pjeter Budi, recorded the form *Scarolli* in a report sent to Rome in September 1621. The ecclesiastical report of Giorgio Stampaneo in about 1685 used the form *Schrieli*. The term Shkreli occurs on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola as *Scarieli*. In 1703, we also encounter the written variant *Scrielli*. The Slavic version of the name is *Škrijelj*.

Edith Durham derived the word Shkreli from *Shën Kerli* i.e. Saint Charles (Carlo), possibly the early patron saint of a church there.¹⁰⁶

The Shkreli were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of one *bajrak*.

Mariano Bolizza referred to the Shkreli in 1614 as having 20 households and 43 men in arms, commanded by one Gjon Poruba, and later as having 30 households and 80 men in arms, commanded by one Messa Porubba.¹⁰⁷

The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported: 'The village of Scarieli [Shkreli] is ten miles from Riolo and has 65 homes and 500 souls. A set of vestments is needed here. There was a church dedicated to Saint Veneranda, but it has collapsed. 50 *scudi* would be needed for its reconstruction.'

In 1838, the Austro-Hungarian physician Joseph Müller was informed by a Pater Deda of Vukël that there were 1,900 inhabitants in Shkreli.¹⁰⁸

At about the same time (1841), in his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains,' Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gave the population of Shkreli as 2,800, of whom 700 were men in arms.¹⁰⁹

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Shkreli tribe were given as follows: 415 households with a total of 2,688 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Bzheta (Bërzheta), Dedaj, Vrith and Zagora.¹¹⁰

The population of Shkreli is mainly Catholic. Although their tribal designation is said by Durham to be related to Saint Charles, it was Saint Nicholas of Bari whom they regarded as their patron saint. The feast of Saint Nicholas on 6 December, a pre-Christian festival observed in Albania by Christians and Muslims alike, celebrated the return of the souls of the dead and was commemorated by the slaughtering and roasting of a sheep on a spit. For this feast, the animal was kept in the house a long time in advance. In Shkreli, as well as in Hoti, Gruda and Kastrati, the feast of Saint Nicholas could last for a whole week. It was custom here to light a candle and to leave the door open on the eve of Saint Nicholas to let the saint and the spirits of the dead into the house so that they might take part in the feast. The owner of the house would raise his glass of raki and say, 'May the night of Saint Nicholas help us!' (*Nata e Shënkollit na nihmofitë!*). The longer the candle burnt, the greater the prosperity would be for the house in question. One curse used by the tribes in this region was, 'May the devil blow out your Saint Nicholas candle.' The Shkreli often concluded a *besa*, i.e. a cease-fire, to facilitate celebrations during the feast of their patron saint. It was traditional among many tribes in the north for feuding families to meet on Saint Nicholas Day in order to reconcile and put an end to their feuds. Saint Nicholas was also commemorated on 8–9 May, the feast of the translation of Saint Nicholas, i.e. the anniversary of the transfer of his remains to Bari in 1087. The Shkreli and the Shala celebrated the May feast of Saint Nicholas when departing with their herds for summer pasture. The Shkreli also celebrated Saint Veneranda whose feast day was 26 July. Aside from the Catholic majority, there was a Muslim minority in Shkreli of about 15 per cent.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard reported that the Shkreli descended from an old Albanian family in the region of Peja, whose chief was called Kerli. When they settled in their new mountain homeland, he dedicated the tribe to Saint Carlo, thus the name Shkreli.¹¹¹ Edith Durham, for her part, stated that they had come from Bosnia 300 year earlier.¹¹² Carleton Coon heard a similar version half a century later: 'The people of Shkreli, comprising a whole bayrak, are said to have come from Bosnia en masse around 1600 and taken over a valley whose inhabitants had been killed off and whose church Shën Kerli (St Charles, hence Shkreli) destroyed.'¹¹³ In 1907, Baron Nopcsa recorded that the Shkreli were able to trace their ancestry back nine generations, which he dated to 1650¹¹⁴ and postulated that they could equally have stemmed from the Sanjak of Novi Pazar rather than from Bosnia proper.¹¹⁵

With time, many Shkreli tribesmen left their native region and settled, in particular, on the coast of what is now Montenegro, in the Rugova highlands in western Kosovo and, from there, in the Sanjak of Novi Pazar. The Shkreli of Rugova settled in the region of Rožaje in Montenegro and nearby Tutin in Serbia in 1700. There they founded a settlement called Shkreli [Škrijelje]. Later in the eighteenth century, they settled in the lower Pešter region and in Novi Pazar. Most of them were gradually assimilated, but in the village of Boroštica and Gradac in the Pešter mountains, they maintained their Albanian language until quite recently.

As the Përroi i thatë River is usually dry, the mostly karstic land of Shkreli is not particularly suitable for farming. Some maize and grain is grown and there are a few orchards, but otherwise there is little agricultural activity. Their territory is the most stony and waterless of the Malësia e Madhe.¹¹⁶ The population, which never exceeded 7,000, was poor and traditionally more devoted to herding. Hyacinthe Hecquard reported that in the first half of the nineteenth century, the destitute Shkreli asked the pasha of Shkodra for permission to use barren or otherwise unexploited land on the plains in order to be able to feed themselves. Osman Pasha accorded them the use of the lush fields and meadows along the lower banks of the Buna (Bojana) River, between Saint George (Sveti Đorđe), Reç and Pulaj. It was thus hither that they used to drive their herds of sheep and goats to graze in the wintertime. They also received some pastureland among the barren hills along the

coast between Pulaj and Medua (Shëngjin), near the mouth of the Drin River. They herded in the winter and, with time, the men began to do some farming there in the summer months. Some Shkreli families then settled here permanently.

Hecquard noted that with the grain and maize they grew in the lowlands and with the wool and dairy products they sold in Shkodra, they came to achieve modest prosperity such as could be seen in the rich silver plating on their pistols and sabres.¹¹⁷

The Shkreli were in conflict with Gimaj in Shala territory over pastureland on Mount Troshan, which is situated between them. This led to much hostility between the two tribes in the early twentieth century.¹¹⁸

Travel Impressions

In 1905, Karl Steinmetz described his hike through Shkreli land as follows:

Our surroundings were bleak and desolate indeed. Neither grass nor water. Proni i thatë (Dry Creek) was a perfect name for the valley. It is the stoniest and most arid region in all of the Highlands and, for this reason, the Shkreli tribe that lives here does not do any farming but only herding. In the summer, they drive their animals up into the lush mountain pastures, and in the wintertime they keep them in the lowlands and feed them on the hay they bring down from the mountains and on cobs of maize. Only a few families move south to the warmer coastal region in the winter. In this sense, the Shkreli are different from their northern neighbours, the Kelmendi, almost all of whom spend the winter on the coast south of Shkodra.¹¹⁹

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Shkreli, which she visited in May 1908 to attend the feast of the translation of Saint Nicholas.

I had planned to stay some days at Bratoshi, but was urged to go at once to Skreli to the Feast of the Translation of St. Nikolas, the tribal saint, where the tribes would gather in their best array. So, as all the world was going to Skreli, to Skreli I went. Among our company was a Kastrati man from Podgoritza in Montenegro,

whither he had fled from blood some years ago. He spoke Serb well, and was in the highest spirits, for the fact that by coming to the feast he risked his life, added much spice to the outing.

'How many have you killed?' I asked. 'Eight—up till to-day,' said he cheerfully. A Moslem had shot one of his sons, whereon he had shot four of that Moslem's near relatives, and flitted over the border. It pleased him much. The Moslem would mind it far more than being shot himself. He joked about his fellow-tribesmen: 'Wild people,' said he.

'Art thou wild, too?' I asked. 'No, no,' said he, adding with a beaming smile: 'I've killed many men though, Christians and Moslems, and God willing, I will shoot some more. Now I am going to pray to St. Nikola.'

He had a son in training as a Montenegrin officer, and was loud in praise of Prince Nikola. His grand-children will probably be Orthodox and Serbophone, and his great-grandchildren swear they have been Serb from the beginning of time. And thus for centuries have the Balkan races been made.

The track to Brzheta led up over stones to the ridge of the mountain, where a rough wall marked the frontier of Kastrati and Skreli, and then down a stony zigzag, too steep for the horses, which were led round. The church and church-house stand in the valley of the Proni Thaat. The priest of Skreli, whose own bishop describes him as 'tiny but terrible,' brimming with energy and hospitality, was making great preparations for guests. On a feast-day, he declared, two or three more or less made no difference, he could find room for me somewhere.

Beyond the green bed of the valley rose, snow-capped, the wall of mountain that parts Skreli from the Pulati tribes. Skreli tells a tale of origin from Bosnia.

I paid visits. The people, most friendly, were delighted to let me 'write' their houses. They are of stone with tiled roof. The ground floor is stable. The dwelling-room above is approached by an outside staircase of stone or wood, which leads often to a large covered balcony. The windows are few and small. The fire is lit on an open hearth at one end, the smoke escaping through the unceiled roof. Behind the hearth is a recess in the wall to contain cooking utensils. Many houses have a wattled larder standing

on posts in the yard, especially to keep milk in. Every house expected guests.

In the evening the priest's guests began arriving—two Franciscans, two priests, and last not least, the deputy Archbishop of Scutari—and the fun began. As each and his retainers got within howling distance they yelled aloud, hailing their host.

The priest of Skreli then dashed wildly to the window, leaned perilously far out, and hurled his voice back, at the same time emptying a revolver. The visitor replied with a volley, rode up full clatter, rushed upstairs and helped to yell and fire greetings at the next comer. They were all young, and were in the highest spirits—for a mountain mission priest gets very little fun in his life—when the Archbishop turned up. Finding them there, he pretended at first to be severe, for the feast-day to-morrow was a Sunday, and without his permission none were supposed to absent themselves from their own parishes on a Sunday. However, they all vowed that all their own parishioners were coming to the feast, and that it was their duty to come and look after them, and the Archbishop was soon as festive as every one else. Meantime guests were arriving at all the other houses, and a continuous rifle-fire swished and tore down the valley. We sat down to supper, a most ecclesiastical party. I found myself on the right hand of the Archbishop, the solitary female among six churchmen. But they all spoke some language I did, were immensely kind, and all invited me to visit their tribes. [...]

The feast really fell on the Saturday. It was kept on Sunday because Saturday is a fast-day, and you cannot feast without roast mutton. Early Sunday morning the guests poured down the zig-zag in a living cataract on the one side, and flocked from the valleys on the other—from Hoti, from Kastrati and Boga, all in their best—men first, their women following. As each batch came in sight of the church they yelled for the priest; bang, bang went fifty rifles at once; swish-ish-ish flew the bullets; pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop replied the priest's old six-shooter. Before midday the meeting-ground round the church was packed with magnificent specimens of humanity. The visitor to Scutari rarely sees the really fine mountain man—he is either at feud with the Government or owes blood, and sends his women to the town when business is necessary.

Etiquette demanded that the Skreli people, being the hosts, should not wear their best clothes, it is for the guests to do all the peacocking. And peacock they did. Many carried splendid silver-mounted weapons, and even though wearing revolvers, thrust great silver ramrods in their belts, for 'swagger.' Snow-white headwraps dazzled in the sun—crimson and gold *djemadans* and *jeleks*, the short black *ghurdi*, and the splendidly decorative black braiding of the tight-fitting *chakshir* (trousers), and the heavy silver watch and pistol chains—set lavishly with the false rubies and turquoise loved of the mountain man—set off the lean supple figures to the greatest advantage. The majority belonged to the long-faced, aquiline-nosed type, with long, well-cut jawbone, eyebrows that slope downwards, and either hazel eyes and brown hair, or grey-blue eyes and fair hair. All had shaven heads, the unshaven patch varying in shape and position. To study head-tufts one must go to church festivals. Only then are a number seen uncovered. [...]

The church-bell rang, the church was packed, Place was given to visitors, and most of the Skreli tribe knelt on the ground outside.

A week's *besa* had been sworn for the festival, so that all blood foes could meet as friends.

After church there was a rush for the rifles, stacked outside; a shooting competition began, accompanied by a general fusillade. And all were so gay and friendly it was hard to believe that they nearly all owed, or were owed, blood.

About three o'clock the whole gathering broke up with amazing speed, to dine with their Skreli hosts. Firing continued light-heartedly till late at night, but no accident marred the *festa*. *Festas* do not always pass off so well among the wilder tribes. The Archbishop told how, when he was parish priest in a Pulati tribe, he once had seven shot dead just outside his church on the feast of the patron saint.¹²⁰

Figures of Note

Azem Shkreli

The Kosovo Albanian poet and writer, Azem Shkreli (1938–97) is a central figure of modern Albanian poetry. As a scion of the Shkreli tribe, he was born in the village of Shkrel in the Rugova highlands near Peja.

He graduated from secondary school in Prishtina in 1961, and then went on to study at the University in Prishtina from which he graduated in 1965 with a diploma in Albanian language and literature. As a student, Shkreli had begun writing for the daily newspaper *Rilindja* and served as secretary for the Kosovo Writers' Union. From 1960 to 1975, he worked as director of the People's Provincial Theatre (*Teatri Popullor Krabitor*) in Prishtina. For a time, he was also a member of the executive board of the Writers' Union of Yugoslavia. In 1975, Shkreli became director of Kosovafilm film studios, a post he held until he was expelled by the imposed Serbian administration in 1991. He was then forced into exile and lived on and off in Germany for several years. He died at Prishtina airport during a visit to his homeland. Azem Shkreli began publishing in the early 1960s. Although he also wrote short stories and plays, he remained primarily a poet throughout his life, and published a total of ten verse collections from 1960 to 1997. His works have had an influence on almost all Kosovo poets of the younger generation. His verse was published in English in the volume *Blood of the Quill*, (Los Angeles, 2008).

VDEKJA E MALSORIT

*Asnjë kokë përkulur
 Se ia rrëxoni lisat
 Asnjë gjëmë mësa guri
 Se ja shembni majet
 Asnjë lot asnjë
 Se ja shqetroni krojet
 Në sytë e tij vetëm
 Harroi prendimin dita
 Ç'mendim i vrugët
 Ç'mendim i frihtë ndër vetulla
 Lum ky çfarë vdekje*

THE DEATH OF THE HIGHLANDER

Bow not a single head,
 For you will topple his oak trees.
 Mourn not, be hard as stone,

For you will cause his peaks to crumble.
 No tears, not one,
 For you will dry up his springs.
 In his eyes only
 The daylight forgot to recede.
 What a gloomy thought,
 What a chilling thought beneath all brows.
 Lucky him. What a death!¹²¹

The Lohja Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The small Lohja (or Lohe) tribal region is situated in the upper valley of the Proni i thatë (Dry Creek) in the District of Malësia e Madhe in northern Albania, around the village of Dedaj on the southern side of the valley. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Shkreli and Kastrati to the west and north, and Reçi and Rrjollli to the south. The main settlements of this tribe are Lohja e Poshtme (Lower Lohja) and Lohja e Sipërme (Upper Lohja), about 15 kilometres northeast of Koplik.

Population

The term Lohja occurs, according to Edith Durham, in a Serbian document in 1348 as *Lobo*.¹²² The form *Loeia* is mentioned in the ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari in 1671. On the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli, the region is called *Lobeia*, and in an ecclesiastical report in 1703 the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich, records the forms *Locheia* and *Lobeia*.

The Lohja, initially with two *bajraks*, formed one *bajrak* with the neighbouring and equally small Reçi tribe, which lived slightly farther down the valley. It was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

Lohja was originally a Catholic tribe. It later turned Muslim, though it retained a large Catholic minority. The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported:

The village of Loeia [Lohja], 6 miles from Riolo, is the site of the church of Saint Nicholas, that seems to be roofless. There are 20 homes here, and 183 souls. 30 *scudi* would be needed to repair the church. Needed in this village are a set of vestments and an icon of Saint Nicholas.¹²³

Edith Durham described Lohja as one *bajrak*, consisting of 80 Moslem and 40 Catholic houses.

It has a mosque and a *bodza*, and shares a priest with Rechi, the tribe next door – also mostly Moslem. Rechi-Lohja is of mixed stock, mainly originating from Pulati and Slaku, and was originally all Catholic.¹²⁴

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Lohja tribe were given as follows: 94 households with a total of 709 inhabitants.¹²⁵

French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard regarded the Lohja, together with the neighbouring Reçi, as a particularly intelligent tribe. Their renown was such that their chiefs and elders were almost always consulted by the other tribes in matters of war or when important decisions were to be taken, and the opinion of this tribe was generally followed. Because of their intelligence and fidelity, they were also much sought after as servants for large Muslim families and pashas.¹²⁶

The Lohja tribe shared pastureland on the coast on the slopes of Mali i Rrencit with Shkreli, Rrjolli and Kelmendi, where they were wont to spend their winters with the herds.¹²⁷

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Edith Durham states that the Lohja were of mixed descent from Shllaku and Pulati. 'Probably families flowed down into this more fertile district not far from the lake when Serb rule broke up, for "Loho" and its mills are mentioned in 1348 by Stefan Dushan among the districts which are given to the Church.'¹²⁸ Baron Nopcsa estimated that they arrived in their present tribal territory in about 1590, which was equivalent to 11 generations before his time (ca. 1907).¹²⁹

The Reçi Tribe of Malësia e Madhe

Location of Tribal Territory

The small Reçi tribal region¹³⁰ is situated in the upper valley of the Proni i thatë (Dry Creek) in the District of Malësia e Madhe in northern Albania, on the southern side of the valley. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Lohja, Shkreli and Kastrati to the north and west, and Rrjollli to the south. The main settlement and centre of the tribal region is the village of Reç, about ten kilometres northeast of Koplik.

Population

The Reçi were a primarily Muslim tribe. They formed one *bajrak* with the neighbouring and equally small Lohja tribe, which lived slightly farther up the valley. They were of polyphyletic origin and were thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

The Venetian writer Mariano Bolizza referred to *Rassa* in 1614 as having 20 households and 45 men in arms, commanded by one Gjon Salico (Gjon Saliko).¹³¹ In his 1671 report, the apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, mentions Prelnikaj (Prendnikaj) with the modern church of Saint Elias, and Ulnikaj near Ricci with 25 households and 163 Catholic souls, both of these being hamlets of Reçi. The form *Reçi* occurs in 1689 on the map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola and in 1688 and 1691 on the maps of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli (although the latter misplaces it).¹³²

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Reçi tribe of Malësia e Madhe were as follows: 172 households with a total of 1,414 inhabitants.¹³³ The village of Reç has a current population of some 600.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard regarded the Reçi, together with the neighbouring Lohja, as a particularly intelligent tribe. Their renown was such that their chiefs and elders were almost always consulted by the other tribes in matters of war or when important decisions were to be

taken, and the opinion of this tribe was generally followed. Because of their intelligence and fidelity, they were also much sought after as servants for large Muslim families and pashas.¹³⁴

Hecquard dated the Reçi from the sixteenth century. The oral tradition he encountered described them stemming originally from two Catholic families of Reç, a settlement of the same name on the lower banks of the Buna (Bojana) River. They are said to have fled from there, for reasons unknown, to take shelter in the mountains where they were protected by the neighbouring Shkreli tribe.¹³⁵ Edith Durham regarded them as of mixed descent from Shllaku and Pulati, like the neighbouring Lohja tribe.¹³⁶

As the soil in Reçi is poor and arid, only some maize and grain will grow. The tribe has traditionally, thus, devoted itself primarily to herding.

Travel Impressions

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Reçi, which she visited in May 1908:

Rechi we reached through a forest of monumental chestnuts.¹³⁷ The church and house, which are new, stand high on a shelf with a great free view over the sweep of plain and the lake of Scutari. The priest of Rechi, a keen student of Albanian custom, was full of information both about Rechi and Pulati, where he had spent several years.

He told us of oaths which, if very solemn ones, are always sworn in Rechi and among all the Pulati tribes on a stone as well as on the cross: '*Per guri e per kruch*' (By the stone and the cross). The stone is the more important and comes first. At a gathering of Elders to try a case, the accused will often throw a stone into the middle of the circle, swearing his innocence upon it.

A man when he has confessed something extra bad, and received absolution, generally says, 'I suppose I must bring a stone to church next Sunday?' The stone is carried on the shoulder as a public sign of repentance. And, though told it is not necessary, he usually prefers to bring it. The priest of another district held that the publicity of stone-bringing had such a good moral effect that he never discouraged it. His parishioners sometimes brought very large ones. Whether in proportion to the sin, I know not.

The priests say that, in spite of all their efforts, their parishioners all regard the shooting of a man as nothing compared to the crime of breaking a fast—eating an egg on a Saturday. Fasting in Albania means complete abstinence from any kind of animal food.¹³⁸

The Rrjolli Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Rrjolli tribal region is situated in the District of Malësia e Madhe in northern Albania, about 15 kilometres east of Koplik. It is to be found along the banks of the small Rrjoll River which flows from Mount Bishkaz into Lake Shkodra. Rrjolli borders on the traditional tribal regions of Lohja, Reçi and Grizha to the northwest, Shkreli to the north, and on the tribes of Plani, Xhani, Mëgulla and Suma to the east, on the other side of Mount Bishkaz. The settlements of Rrjolli are primarily on the left (southern) side of the river, along the northern slopes of Mount Maranaj. Among them are Linaj-Egç-Lepurosh and Kurt-Kurtaj.

Population

The term Rrjoll, which can refer to the tribe and the river, is first mentioned as *Rioli* in the Catasto di Scutari in 1416,¹³⁹ as *fiume clamado Rivola* (the river called Rrjoll) in 1426;¹⁴⁰ as *Rivoli* in 1614 in the report of the Venetian writer Mariano Bolizza; as *Rioli* in about 1685 in the ecclesiastical report of Giorgio Stampaneo; as *Riolo* in 1671 in the report of the apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari; as *Rioli* in 1689 on the map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola; and as *Rioli* in 1688 and 1691 on the maps of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli. The word would seem to be derived from Latin *rivulus* 'river'.

Rrjolli was and is a primarily Catholic tribe. Mariano Bolizza referred to Rjolli in 1614 as having 60 households and 140 men in arms, commanded by one Drë Mida (Ndre Mida).¹⁴¹

The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported:

Riolo [Rrjoll] is situated in the mountains above some hills and is the centre and is equally distant from the villages around Scutari.

Riolo has 20 homes and 156 souls. There is a church here dedicated to the Ascension of Our Lord, built at the recently constructed residence of the Bishop of Scutari. The other villages around Riolo that are under its care are: the village of Ciasamarne (?) with 11 homes and 64 souls, the village of Dodeci [Dedaj] with 3 homes and 26 souls, the village of Rieci [Reç] with 25 homes and 163 souls, the village of Racci (?) with 8 homes and 52 souls, and the village of Vorfa [Vorfa] with 3 homes and 15 souls. At that time, the reverend father Clemente of Brindisi, of the Apostolic Mission of the Patres Reformati, was serving and assisting the people there. The Eucharist is not held here although there is no threat from the Turks. There are other settlements a bit farther away that are also under the care of Riolo.¹⁴²

French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard referred to Rrjolli in the first half of the nineteenth century as having two hamlets that made up one *bajrak*, and as possessing 220 houses. He estimated the population as 1,600, of whom 1,240 were Catholic. He noted a large, beautiful and recently restored church with a square bell tower dating from the thirteenth century, as well as mills on the river that were used to produce flour and cloth.¹⁴³ Half a century later, Edith Durham remarked that 'cloth-fulling mills still clack on the river'.¹⁴⁴

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Rrjolli tribe were given as follows: 211 households with a total of 1,530 inhabitants.¹⁴⁵ Slightly later the population figure was 1,560, of which 360 were Catholics and 1,200 Muslims.¹⁴⁶

Rrjolli constituted one *bajrak*, although neighbouring Lohja and Reçi were regarded by some as the second *bajrak* of Rrjolli. It was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

Many Rrjolli families spent their winters on the coast between the Bojana River and Shëngjin where they shared pastureland on Mali i Rençit with the Kelmendi and Shkreli tribes. Many of the men of this tribe also worked as bakers in Shkodra.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

As to the origin and history of Rrjolli, Hyacinthe Hecquard noted the following:

Although they are not numerous, this tribe has always managed to conduct itself with courage and to conserve its independence. Like the large tribes, it has its chiefs and *bajraktars* who are ever ready to discuss and defend their interests. According to tradition, they descend from two families of Drivasto [Drisht] who, having retired to the countryside around the town before the siege, abandoned it to live in the mountains at a time when their coreligionists were converting to Islam in order to keep their land. Although the date of this emigration changes from person to person depending who is telling the story, there is no doubt that it cannot go back more than one and a half centuries because, in his report on *Il Sandjiacato di Scutari* [*The Sanjak of Shkodra*] of 1614, which is preserved in the Library of Venice, the Venetian writer Mariano Bolizza does not mention this tribe, nor a village of this name.¹⁴⁷

Other sources tell that the Rrjolli tribe came from Herzegovina after the Turkish conquest of the early sixteenth century.¹⁴⁸

Travel Impressions

The German geographer, Kurt Hassert (1868–1947), making his way through the mountains of northern Albania in the summer of 1897, reported:

We carried on through a rather monotonous countryside of flatland and hills until we reached the valley of Rrjoll, where the pasha had recently burned down a number of houses because the fanatic Christians of the region had been in the forefront of a religious conflict with the Mohammedans. The latter had damaged a Christian cemetery and destroyed a cross that the Christians had set up along the path. The Christians then threw a dead pig into a mosque and painted crosses on its walls with the pig's blood.¹⁴⁹

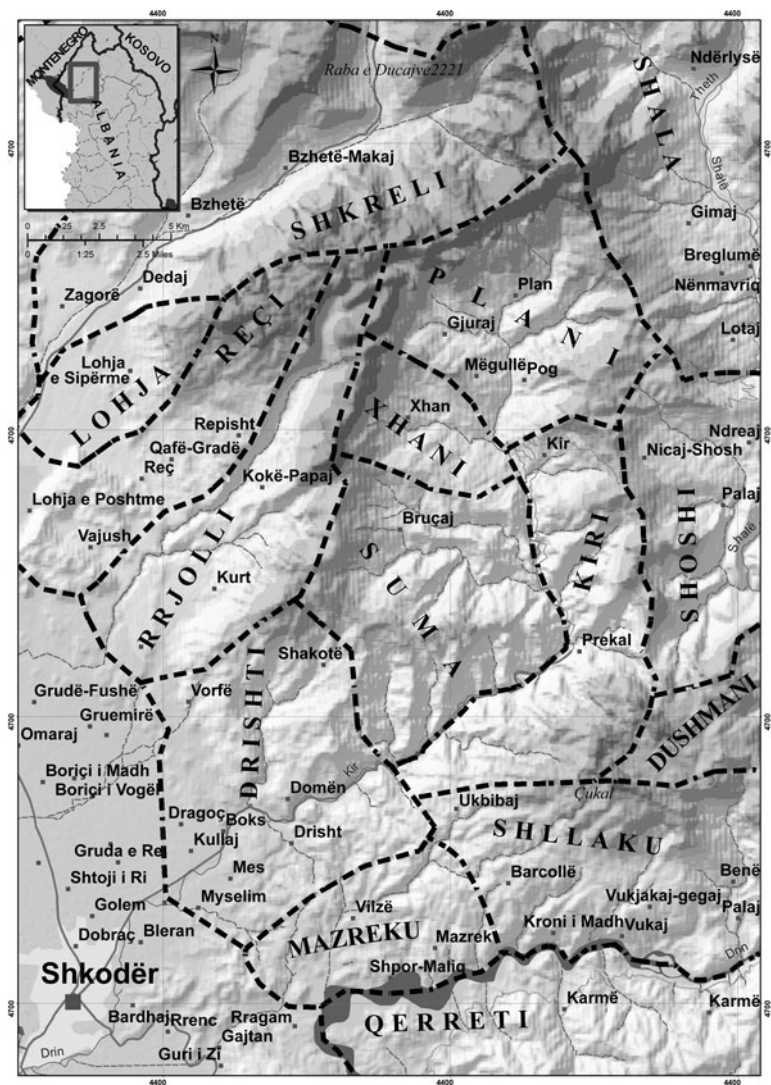
Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Rrjollë, which she visited in May 1908:

We left that afternoon for Rioli, but a two and a half hours' walk over a ridge and up the valley of a crystal-clear stream that turns many corn-grinding and wool-fulling mills, both of the usual Balkan pattern. In the fulling mill a large wooden axle, bearing two flanges, is turned by a water-wheel. The flanges, as they turn, catch and raise alternately two large and heavy wooden mallets, made preferably of walnut, which falling, pound and hammer the yards of wet hand-woven woollen material (*shiak*) which is heaped in a box beneath them. In forty-eight hours it is beaten into the cloth that is the common wear of Bosnia, Montenegro, and North Albania.

Corn-mills are often very small—a tiny shed on posts over a little cataract that shoots with great force through a pipe, made of a hollowed tree-trunk—the exit hole very small—against a small turbine wheel. The upright axle passes through the two stones, turning the upper one. The maize is fed from a wooden hopper, its flow ingeniously regulated by a twig that plays on the surface of the upper stone. Mills are generally private property of a group of families, each grinding its own maize in turn.

The church of Rioli stands high on the right bank of the valley, that is here richly wooded. In the cliff on the opposite side is the cave in which Bishop Bogdan refuted from the Turks in the seventeenth century.

Rioli is a small tribe of one bariak, I believe of mixed origin. It belongs to the diocese of Scutari.¹⁵⁰



The tribal regions of Pulat

CHAPTER 2

THE TRIBES OF THE PULAT REGION

The Plani Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Plani (formerly Plandi or Planti) tribal region is situated in the District of Shkodra in northern Albania. It is located at the very upper (northern) end of the Kir River valley in the mountainous and isolated Pulat region. Plani borders on the traditional tribal lands of Boga to the north, Shala to the east, Kiri and Xhani to the south, and Shkreli to the west. The main settlements of Plani are the little villages of Plan and Gjuraj-Boks.

Population

The term Plani was recorded as *Plandi Villa* in 1628, as *Planti* in 1671 in the ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari. It is found as *Plandi* on the map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli in 1688, and as *Planti* in 1703 in the report of the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich.

The Plani tribe consisted of one *bajrak*. It was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

Plani was a primarily Catholic tribe. It was traditionally about 85 per cent Catholic and 15 per cent Muslim. The patron saint of the Catholics of Plani was Saint Anthony the Abbot, known in Albanian as *Shna Ndou* or simply *Shnou*. The feast of this Saint Anthony (not to be

confused with Saint Anthony of Padua) is 16–17 January. The Catholic parish of Plani dates from 1839.¹

The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported:

The village of Plani has 52 homes and 312 souls. There is a church here dedicated to Saint Anthony the Abbot, built of stone and in good condition. In this village lives Don Francesco Samerissi, parish priest of the said villages. This church is devoid of vestments and thus needs a chasuble, chalice, missal, book of rites and linen cloth for the host. Its chalice is cracked at the bottom and can only be used with great difficulty for mass. The said priest takes care of the holy garments. All the other, aforementioned churches in these villages are devoid of vestments and holy furnishings. The priest must therefore bring his own vestments when he celebrates mass in these villages, which he does three to four times a month. It is quite exhausting for him because the village is 12 miles away. The villages of Buccamira [Bukëmira] and of Daizza [Dajca] have 10 homes and 73 souls. It has no church. The inhabitants go to hear mass at the village of Planti. These villages provide the priest with quantities of grain for his household and four pounds of cheese.²

The French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard reported in the first half of the nineteenth century that the Plani tribe had 180 houses and 1,135 inhabitants.³

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Plani tribe were given as follows: 171 households with a total of 980 inhabitants.⁴

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Plani constituted one *bajrak*. Edith Durham noted that it consisted of three stocks that were intermarriageable and that traced their descent from Kelmendi, Mërturi and an earlier population called the 'Anas'.⁵ Baron Nopcsa explained further that the segment of the population of Plani that made up the village of Gjuraj and part of Mëgulla was from Kelmendi. The people from the village of Thana were from Mërturi, and Gjinaj stemmed from Montenegro. The inhabitants of Boksh

represented the oldest stratum of the population and settled in this region in pre-Turkish times. It was generally thought that the inhabitants of Boksh were the people responsible for the fall of the ancient fortress of Plan, known as the Castle of Boksh (*kalaja e Boksht*). It is said that the Turks were not able to take the fortress despite years of siege. One day, however, the Boksh people showed the Turks where the water supply entered the fortress from the mountains above it. The Turks threw a dead dog into the water pipe and, when those inside the fortress tried to find out why the water had gone so bad, they came across the carcass. From then on, they refused to drink any more water and were, as such, forced to abandon the fortress. The commander of the fortress was a certain king Gjergj Pulatik or Gjurgj Epulatik.

One subsequent historical event discredited Plani in the eyes of the other tribes. Their *bajraktar* (standard bearer) was killed in a war with Montenegro and lost the tribe's flag, which was seized by a warrior from Gimaj in neighbouring Shala. Thereafter, the flag of Plani, much to their shame, was in the possession of a family in Gimaj.⁶

Travel Impressions

Edith Durham described her arrival in Plani in the spring of 1908 as follows:

We reached Plani at midday; it lies at the head of the valley of the Kiri. The church stands in a most charming spot. A small catacract leaps down from high above, through a wooded gorge—a bower of coolness and greenery after the roasting track.

Plani, a tribe of one bariak, traces origin from three stocks which are intermarriageable. One hales from Kilmeni. Fifty years ago, people say, they dressed like Mirdites; but I heard no tale of relationship with them.

Plani owed very little blood within the tribe, but was in blood with several neighbour tribes.

When a feud is reconciled in Plani (and some other districts I believe), a woman brings an infant in a cradle and turns it upside down between the foes, turning the child out on the ground. As it is always tied down tightly by the cradle cover; it can be gently released—the ceremony is not so violent as it sounds.

There are a good many ceremonies about the laying of blood to be learnt. [...]

Plani knows many strange things. There is a group of houses not far from the church, which has had a curse upon it for many years, so that the families never increase in number. I visited one small house; it contained eighteen people, so perhaps the failure to increase is rather a blessing than a curse.

Talk ran on the *chytet* (fortress), very ancient—who knows, perhaps, a thousand years. Was it far? I asked, for I was tired. ‘Oh, no,’ said the Franciscan, ‘we can go and come back easily in an hour.’

We started; the track degenerated into a narrow ledge crawling along the side of the mountain, betwixt heaven above and the river below; and at the finish, the spur of the hill, there was a rocky pinnacle to climb.

An extraordinarily wild spot. The sharp peak rose high, with a deep valley on three sides of it. In the gap between it and the range of which it was the final point are traces of the *chytet*; the remains of three wells, now choked with stones. Part of the rock face is roughly hewn, and a few small ledges are cut in it. A rudely-built bastion overhangs the precipice. [...]

Plani has little maize land, and has to buy. Some men and very many women were toiling in long weary strings over Shala to Gusinje, climbing two high passes—a frightfully severe two days’ march—maize being cheaper there than at Scutari. The return journey of wretched beings, staggering under loads of 60 or 70 lbs., is horrible to see. The cords that bind on the burden often cut right into the shoulder. The maize lasts little more than a week, and the weary journey begins again. Small wonder that the toil-broken people begged that the Powers would enforce the making of a railway to Scutari.⁷

The Xhani Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The tribal region of the Xhani (also spelled Xhaj, Gjani and formerly Joani, Ghoanni) is situated in the District of Shkodra in northern

Albania. It is located on the right (western) side of the upper Kir River valley in the mountainous and isolated Pulat region. Xhani borders on the traditional tribal lands of Plani (and Mëgulla) to the north, Kiri to the east, Suma to the south, and Rrjolli to the west. The main settlement of Xhani is the village of the same name, Xhan or Gjan.

Population

The term Xhani was recorded as *Giovanni* in 1671 in the ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari and as *Zuanni* on the map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli in 1688. It would seem to be related to the Christian name John, Ital. Giovanni.

The Xhani were a small, primarily Catholic tribe (*bajrak*) that lived in close proximity to the Kiri and Suma tribes. They were about two-thirds Catholic and one-third Muslim. Gaspari referred to the place as follows in 1671: 'The village of Giovanni has 22 homes and 80 souls. There is a church here dedicated to Saint Nicholas, built of stone, covered in slabs, and in good condition.'⁸ The Catholic bishop of the whole Pulat region resided in Xhan, before being transferred to Kodra e Shëngjergjit.⁹

The French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard reported in the first half of the nineteenth century that the Xhani tribe had 115 houses and 662 inhabitants.¹⁰

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Xhani tribe were given as follows: 62 households with a total of 435 inhabitants.¹¹

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The Xhani tribe were said to have lived originally in what is now Shkreli land. When the Shkreli arrived from Kosovo and took possession of the Proni i thatë (Dry Creek) valley, they expelled the Xhani and pushed them over the mountains into their present territory in Pulat.¹²

Travel Impressions

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Xhani, which she visited in May 1908:

We came late to Ghoanni [Xhani], though the distance was little. The track was broken away; the horses had to slide down what looked like an impossible slope, with a man hanging on to the head and tail of each to break the speed, and we made a long circuit. When we came finally to the Palace of the Bishop of Pulati—a ramshackle little place in native style, with a crazy wooden balcony—his Grace was having an afternoon siesta. To my horror he was waked up to receive me, but such was his Christian spirit that he took me in and fed me.

The Palace is snugly stowed among trees, and running water in plenty flows hard by. It is characteristic of the land that no decent path leads to it. I lay and lounged in the meadow at the side. The air was leaden-heavy, there were lordly chestnut trees near, and a drowsy humming of bees. All the world seemed dozing. The peace was broken suddenly by two gunshots that thudded dully down in the valley—then two more—and silence.

‘What is that?’ I asked, mildly interested.

‘A wedding, probably,’ said Marko. ‘It is Monday—the marrying day with us.’

We strolled from the field, and scrambled along the hillside towards a group of cottages. The first woman we met asked us in to hers at once—a most miserable hovel, windowless, pitch-dark in the corners; a sheep was penned in one and a pig wandered loose. She began to blow up the ashes and make coffee. Life was hard, she said—maize dreadfully dear. You had to drive ten kids all the way to Scutari and sell them to get as much maize as you could carry back. Shouts rang up the valley; a lad dashed in with the news. The shots we heard had carried death. At a spot just over an hour away an unhappy little boy, unarmed and but eight years old, had been shot for blood, while watching his father’s sheep on the hillside, by a Shoshi man.

The Shoshi man had quarrelled some time ago with a Ghoanni man, who in the end had snatched a burning brand from the hearth and thrown it at him. A blow is an unpardonable insult. The Shoshi man demanded blood and refused to swear *besa*.

He had now washed his honour in the blood of a helpless victim, whose only crime was that he belonged to the same tribe as the offender.¹³

The Kiri Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Kiri tribal region is situated in the District of Shkodra in northern Albania. It is located on the left (eastern) side of the upper Kir River valley in the mountainous and isolated Pulat region, from the border with Plani down to Ura e Shtrejtë. Kiri borders on the traditional tribal lands of Plani to the north, Xhani and Suma to the west, Shoshi to the east, and Shllaku to the south. The main settlements of Kiri are the villages of Kir and Prekal.

Population

The Kiri tribe is named after the Kir River that flows down through the Pulat region to Shkodra, where it joins the Drin River. It was mentioned in antiquity by the Roman historian Livy¹⁴ as *Clausala*, and in the fifth-century Tabula Peutingeriana (Peutinger Table) as *Cleusis*. The Scutarine historian Marinus Barletius (ca. 1450–1512) referred to it in 1474 as *Kiri*. Jacques de Lavardin, in his book *Historie of George Castriot, Surnamed Scanderbeg, King of Albanie* records the form *Clyre* in 1576 (French edition) and 1596 (English edition). The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, mentioned *Chiri* in his ecclesiastical report of 1671. The river name appears as *Kiri* and *Chiri* in 1688 and 1691 on the maps of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli, and as *Chirli* in 1689 on the map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola. All of these early instances of the word refer, however, to the river rather than to the Kiri tribe living in relative obscurity on its upper banks. Baron Nopcsa, nonetheless, records an instance of *Kiri* used as a personal name in 1364 (Nilus Chirist).¹⁵

The Kiri tribe consisted of one *bajrak*. It was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

The Kiri were a small, primarily Catholic tribe that lived in close proximity to the Xhani and Suma tribes. They were about three-quarters Catholic and one-quarter Muslim.

The patron saint of the Kiri tribe was Saint Veneranda, *She Prenja*, whose feast was commemorated on 25–26 July, which is also the feast of Saint Anne. The first church of Saint Veneranda of Kiri dates from before 1636. Kiri also celebrated the feast of Saint Michael on 29 September,

which was observed by the slaughtering and roasting of a sheep. Near the old parsonage of Kiri there was once a Benedictine monastery dedicated to Saint Michael, which was razed in the early Ottoman period. The Franciscans first visited the Kiri region in 1636 and settled there in 1750 when they constructed a church and parsonage for their parish.¹⁶

The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported: ‘The village of Chiri [Kiri] has 43 homes and 300 souls. There is a church here dedicated to Saint Veneranda, that was recently restored. The village of Casnessi has 9 homes and 45 souls. There is no church so the inhabitants go to the village of Chiri to attend mass.’¹⁷

The French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard reported in the first half of the nineteenth century that the Kiri tribe had 93 houses and 620 inhabitants.¹⁸

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Kiri tribe were given as follows: 87 households with a total of 534 inhabitants.¹⁹

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The Kiri are said to descend from two stocks, one from Kuči in Montenegro and the other from Peja.²⁰ Nopcsa calculated that their ancestors from Kuči must have arrived in their present territory sometime around 1550. The Kiri knew their genealogy from Kuči through 12 generations down to Nopcsa’s time (around 1907): Nrekal (Drekal) Kuči > Petal Nrekali > Vuz Petali > Gjini Vuzi > Pep Gjini > Nreh Pepa > Palush Nreu > Nik Palushi > Pal Nika > Lul Pali > Pal Lula > Mihil Pali. The arrival of the families from Peja, who lived in Nonaj, was said to have taken place six generations before Nopcsa’s time, i.e. about 1750.²¹

Travel Impressions

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Kiri, which she visited in the spring of 1908:

Following up and then fording the Kiri, we struck up country by a narrow shady lane, near Muselimi, rich with great clusters of wild purple clematis. Green and steel-blue dragon-flies flashed in the sun, and countless big scarlet-winged grasshoppers danced in dizzy

round, whirring harshly. All nature seemed full of the joy of life. The maize grew fat and luxuriant in the well-tilled fields. There were great fig and olive gardens, and the few vineyards looked flourishing. This, some years ago, the best wine-growing land of the district, was devastated by Phylloxera, and replanting has but just begun. It belongs partly to Moslems and partly to Christians. The desolate stony wastes that now border the Kiri were similarly rich, but floods have torn down all the soil and left ruin behind.

We ascended the valley of a small tributary, and cultivation ceased. The low hills of crumbly red soil are fairly clothed with vegetation and the track good; but neither a house, nor a beast, nor a soul was to be seen, nor any sign of man. Higher up was some cultivated ground, and some men hard at work making an aqueduct, leading water from the stream through a channel they had banked along the hillside and bridging a gap with dug-out wooden troughs on trestles.

To the right of the track, on a wooded hill, stand the ruins of an old church, Kisha Shatit. Deserted churches throughout Albania often stand in thick woods, as some superstition prevents even the Moslems from cutting wood near them.

The ruins are large. The remains of a tower still stand, and walls of large buildings, said to have been a bishop's palace and a monastery, cover all the hilltop. Within the church lay heaps of human bones, for the natives have grubbed up all the floor in vain search of hidden treasure.

A rude altar, built with sticks and boards against a tree, showed where mass is still served once a year. It is not known when the church fell into ruin, but it must have been long ago. The present church of the district is at Mazreku, hard by, and is included in the diocese (but not the district) of Pulati.²²

The Suma Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Suma (also Summa) tribal region is situated in the District of Shkodra in northern Albania, about 20 kilometres northeast of the city of Shkodra. It is to be found on the right (western) side of the upper Kir River in the mountainous and isolated Pulat region. Suma borders on the

traditional tribal lands of Xhani to the north, Kiri to the east, Drishti to the south, and Rrjollë to the west. The main settlement of Suma is the little village of Bruçaj (formerly known as Suma).

Population

Baron Nopcsa notes a personal name 'Demetrius Suma' recorded in 1332. Edith Durham informs us that:

The name Suma occurs in a document of Tsar Dushan, who in 1335 gives to the monastery of Dechani, among other districts, 'the Albanian *katun* Tuzi' along with a number of luckless Albanians who are named: 'Petrus Suma, Mataguzh (the village of Mataguzhi was burnt by the Montenegrins in 1913) with his brothers Laz and Prijezda... Progon, Mira, Marcus Suma, etc.'²³

The Suma tribe was a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of one *bajrak*.²⁴

Suma had a majority of Catholics, though with a good number of Muslim families. In 1920, it was reported to have 374 Catholics and 240 Muslims.²⁵

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Suma tribe were given as follows: 95 households with a total of 641 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Shakota and Suma.²⁶

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The Suma believed that they came from Mirdita, more specifically from the tribe of Oroshi, and that they were thus related to the Shala and the Shoshi. They divided into several branches near Bojë e Sumës, a place situated close to the church of Xhani.²⁷ Edith Durham confirms this belief: 'The present Suma tribe states that it comes from Mirdita. But as the Mirdites do not seem to have arrived till early in the fifteenth century, the "Suma" referred to in 1335 must be the elder population.'²⁸

Travel Impressions

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Suma, which she visited in the spring of 1908:

From Shoshi a fairly good route took us by Chafa Kirit, over the mountains that form the watershed between Shoshi and Lower Pulati, to the church of Kiri, and thence down to and across the river Kiri, tame and shrunken by summer drought. A short ascent on the other side, a descent to cross a tributary stream took us to the church of Suma by about seven.

The priest was away, the house locked up, but we had not long to wait for quarters. A fine young man came down, and asked us to be his guests. The house was a stone one of the shed pattern, one long, windowless room; three men and two women were its inmates, and all at once set to work to make ready for us. One man hurried off, cut great bundles of walnut branches, and made me a springy and deliciously scented couch on the ground just outside the door, where I rested luxuriously. Another rushed to the rising ground above the house, and yelled aloud to the four quarters of the compass: 'We have guests; a man from Scutari, two from Shala, one from Shoshi, and a strange woman.' The cry echoed around. The house was in blood, and this was to warn all whom it might concern that to-night was 'close time for shooting.' A house with guests in it is exempt; and again, as the light faded from the sky, rang the warning yell, 'We have guests.' For it is in the gloaming that the blood-hunter seeks his prey.²⁹

On her second visit to Suma, to distribute humanitarian aid during the uprising in the autumn of 1911, she found the region devastated:

One district, the tribe of Summa, remained unvisited. We started there on horseback to inspect. It was September 24, a golden autumn day, glorious with brown bracken, scarlet berries, and crimson and yellow foliage. Before us, all blue and mysterious, lay the Kiri Valley. It was with extraordinary joy that I, once more after three years' absence, rode into the mountains, past Drishti, which was then a bower of silver olives, up the slopes of Maranaj, and over his shoulder. But the turf, as we began to descend on the farther side, was ringed with the marks of Turkish tents, and the remains of a pack of playing-cards were bleaching in the sun, left, perhaps, by some 'advanced' officer; for it is a common saying 'He is a Moslem, but almost a Christian; he drinks and gambles.'

The track was very bad. We lost it more than once, and it was only after nearly ten hours of riding and scrambling we arrived in the dusk at the miserable house of the priest of Summa. It had been completely pillaged. Save that he had a roof, he was little better off than the poorest of his parishioners, and he gladly shared the food we had brought.

The Summa tribe had made a futile little rising, had failed to reach the other insurgents, been surrounded by troops who burnt thirty-five houses, of which twelve were Moslem, and plundered many of the others. As the wretched people had not succeeded in reaching Montenegro, they were not considered by the Turkish Government as entitled to the maize ration.

Summa was always poor, it was now in abject misery. We found the luckless creatures half-naked among the ruins, the women boiling chopped grass and nettles to feed the children, who shivered in the chill autumn morning in the ragged remains of shirts.

Food was obviously the first necessity here. We gladdened them by the offer of six loads (a load is about 250 pounds) of maize if they would fetch it themselves. I fed them at intervals all through the winter.³⁰

The Drishti Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Drishti tribal region is situated in the District of Shkodra in northern Albania. It is located in the Postripa area, i.e. in the lower valley of the Kir River and on the southern slopes of Mount Maranaj, about 15 kilometres to the northeast of the town of Shkodra. Drishti borders on the traditional tribal regions of Reçi and Rrjoll to the north, Suma and Kiri to the east, Mazreku to the south and southeast, and the plain of Shkodra to the west. The main settlements of Drishti are: Myselim, Mes, Drisht and Domën.

Population

The fortress of Drisht was well known in the Middle Ages. The word is recorded in mediaeval Latin as early as 743 as *Drivastum*, *Drivasto*, *Drienasto*, *Drivastensi*.³¹ We find *Drivastinensem* in 1067,³² *Drivascensis* in 1332, and *Drivastum* in 1419.³³ The fortress occurs as *Drivasto* in 1515

in the Breve memoria di Giovanni Musachi; *Drivasto* in 1570 in the anonymous *Relazione dell' Albania*; *Drivasto* in 1621 in a letter of Pjetër Budi; *Driuasti* in 1629 in the ecclesiastical report of Giezzi Bianco; *Driuasto* in 1641 in a report by Frang Bardhi (Francesco Bianchi); *Driuasto* on the 1684 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola; *vendi j Drijnsctit* in Albanian in 1685 by Pjetër Bogdani; *Driuasto* and *Dristi* in 1688 and 1691 on the maps of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli; and *Drivasto* in 1821 on the map of French consul Hugues Pouqueville.

As to the original form of the word, in addition to the early variants with an intervocalic -v- there are also records of forms with an -n-, for instance *Drinasto* on the 1689 map of Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola. This form either arose through contamination from the word for the nearby river Drin or was the original form. A form *drinast* would have resulted in the Albanian *drinst* and *drisht*. Albanian linguist David Luka, while agreeing that the -n- form is the original, relates the toponym to Alb. *drinjë* 'jagged rock, cliff'. The Drishti tribe, at any rate, took its name from the old fortified settlement of Drisht, whatever may have been its etymology.

The Drishti tribe consisted of one *bajrak*. It was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

The Drishti were a small Muslim tribe who are said to have converted to Islam when three bishops quarreled for Postripa.³⁴

In the mid-nineteenth century, there were 85 houses in the fortress of Drisht that were made of stone taken from the ruins. The Drishti tribe did not have enough land for crops such as maize and wheat but, as there was sufficient water, they grew fruit and vegetables in the surrounding gardens. They also had olive trees and vineyards.³⁵

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Drishti tribe were given as follows: 169 households with a total of 1,191 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Domën, Drisht, Ura e Shtrejtë and Vilza.³⁶

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

In the ninth century, the mountain village of Drisht, that towers over the Kir River, was part of the realm of Zeta and, in the course of the next

four centuries, it was to become one of the major settlements of northern Albania. In the eleventh century, it owed its allegiance to the metropolitan See of Bar [Antivari], which was founded in 1089. Though Byzantine up to the mid-twelfth century, it pledged allegiance to Serbia in 1185. It was ravaged by the Mongols in 1242 and was acquired by the Venetians in 1396 at a time when it issued its own coins marked *Civitas Drivasti*. It also had its own 44-page charter – the ‘Statutes and Regulations of the Cathedral Church of Drisht,’ dating from 1468.³⁷ Drisht was finally destroyed in 1478 when it was taken by the Ottomans. Turkish forces are said at that time to have beheaded the captured leaders of Drisht before the walls of the besieged fortress of Shkodra in order to terrify its inhabitants into submission.³⁸ The fifteenth-century historian Marinus Barletius, a contemporary of the events, recorded the siege of Drisht as follows:

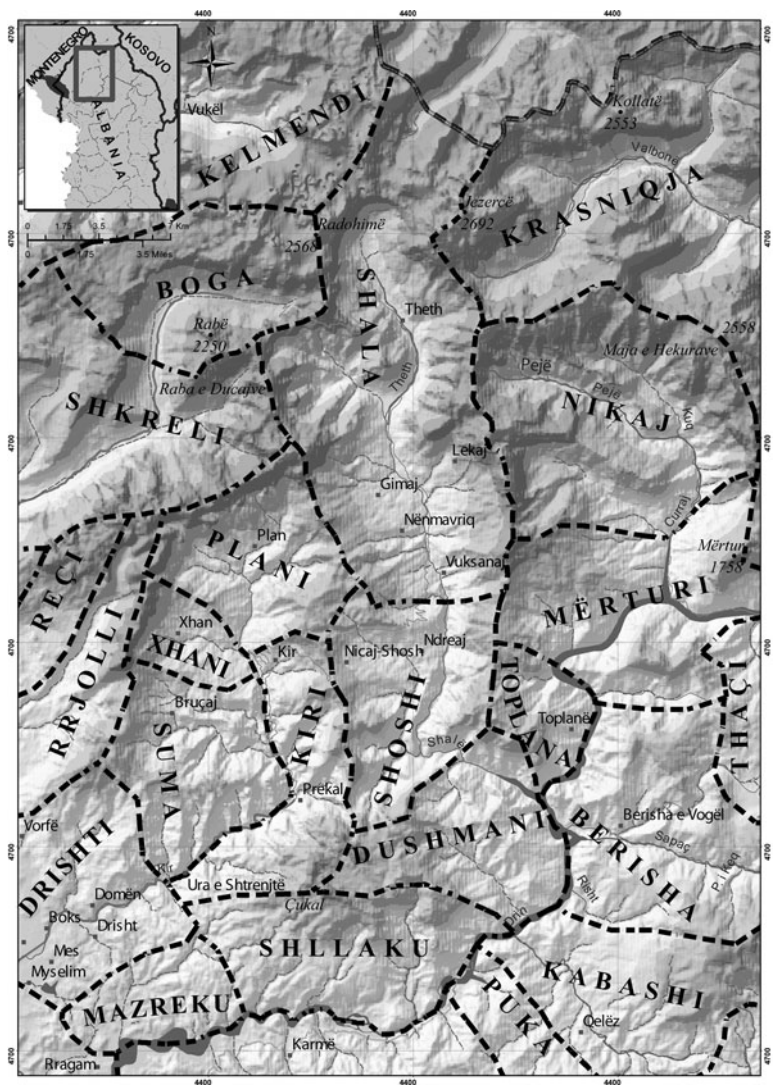
While the surrender of Žabljak was truly shameful, the Drishtans proved more manly and strong. During the siege of Shkodra they had made it a habit, both by day and by night, to emerge seemingly out of nowhere and attack the barbarians’ chariots, cavalry units, camel flocks, and other animals valuable for transport, as well as all the common soldiers. They plundered and took captives. Often they even hit the enemy pavilions, thereby inflicting inestimable damage. When this news reached the sultan’s ear, he became indignant and waited for the moment when the youths of Drisht left the town, in order to take it with greater ease. On August 11, he sent the pasha of Asia with all his units to invade Drisht. The pasha, after he cut off the path of the Christians’ strongest detachment, blocking them from the city, set artillery in the proper positions and began to demolish the walls of the city at the point where they were weakest and would easily fall. The walls were razed to the ground within sixteen days, after which the sultan himself came on August 31, ready to occupy the city that was to be seized on the morrow. Sure enough, on September 1 at sunrise, the sign was given, so the barbarians stormed the city from all sides and infiltrated it without difficulty, primarily because there was no one to resist them, but also because the walls and fortifications had been reduced to rubble. It should be known that Drisht’s castle had a large perimeter. Besides this, all

the youths, who may have numbered eight hundred, had been left outside the city (as mentioned earlier). Furthermore, those inside the city were dying day by day from pestilence. The few who tried to repel the enemy from the fortress were cut down and killed, one by one. Three hundred people were captured alive, and on September 2 they were taken to the main camp. Thereafter, at the sultan's command, they were executed all at once as the Shkodrans watched.³⁹

Remaining at the site are a small hilltop village within the old walls and fortifications, as well as archaeological ruins that have not yet been properly excavated.

The Drishti tribe are of mixed origin but formed a *bajrak* of their own. Some of them, in particular those living in the fortress, claimed to stem directly from Ottoman Turks who settled in the ruins after its conquest and destruction.

The following legend is associated with the conquest of Drisht in 1478. Lekë Dukagjini was at Drisht, defending the fortress from the Turks. Taking the advice of the blinded Pal Dukagjini, he fired a canon at his foes that was loaded with gold coins. This, however, did not have any result because the hungry Turkish soldiers besieging the fortress used the gold to buy food and then continued the siege. The Turks later captured Lekë's wife and threatened to kill her. In her fright, she revealed that the fortifications on the eastern side of the castle were not made of solid stone but simply of animal hides mixed with mortar. With this information, the Turks were able to penetrate and take the fortress. Lekë Dukagjini escaped and fled eastwards into the mountains. The Mërturi tribe are said to be his descendants.⁴⁰



The tribal regions of Dukagjin

CHAPTER 3

THE TRIBES OF THE DUKAGJIN REGION

The Shala Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Shala tribal region is situated in the Dukagjin area north of the Drin River in the present District of Shkodra in northern Albania. The Shala live in the uppermost part of the Shala River valley around the village of Theth where the valley ends and is surrounded by high mountains on all sides. Shala borders on the traditional tribal regions of Boga, Shkreli, and Plani over the mountains to the west, Kelmendi over the mountains to the north, Krasniqja and Nikaj over the mountains to the east, and Shoshi to the south. The main settlements of Shala are: Abat, Bregluma, Gimaj, Lekaj, Lotaj, Ndërlysa, Nënnavriq, Pecaj, Theth and Vuksanaj.

Population

The name Shala occurs in the Italian-language ecclesiastical report of Bonaventura di Palazzolo from Vercelli in Piedmont in 1634. He called the region *Sciala*. In his 1671 ecclesiastical report, the apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari used the term *Sala* and noted

On this side of Mount Agari at the end of Upper Pulat is the village of Shala consisting of 32 households and 200 souls. They are strong and well armed both with regard to their physical conditions and to the site that is kept entirely free and they continually attack the neighbouring Turkish region and almost always return in victory.¹



Figure 3.1 Two of the *djelmnia* or young tribal warriors of Shala



Figure 3.2 Nik Marashi and family of Gimaj in Shala

On the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli the region is called *Scialia*. It also appears as *Scialia* on the 1821 map of the French diplomat Hugues Pouqueville. The term is said to be relate to Alb. *shalë*, *shalësinë* ‘arid, infertile land’, but this is not a very convincing etymology because Shala is one of the few places in the northern mountains that is not arid and infertile.

The Shala tribe consisted of one *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor.

The Shala are closely related to the Shoshi tribe. They were both overwhelmingly Catholic and would earlier not tolerate any Muslims in the valley. The patron saint of the Shala is Saint John the Evangelist, whose feast day was celebrated on 27 December. Nonetheless, as in Nikaj, many of the men were given Muslim names at birth. The Catholic parish of Shala was founded in 1763 though it was abandoned numerous times in the course of history. Theth became a parish of its own in 1892.²

Shala also celebrated the feast of Saint Michael on 29 September, which was observed by slaughtering and roasting a sheep. Before dinner on the eve of Michaelmas, a candle would be lit and, after prayers, a meal would be eaten in honour of the saint. Someone in the family would hold vigil all night and all the next day to ensure that the candle did not go



Figure 3.3 Mar Lula, *bajraktar* of Shala

out. If it did happen to go out, it brought shame and bad luck upon the family in question.

In his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains' in 1841, Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gives the population of Shala as 4,000, of whom 1,000 were men in arms.³ Hyacinthe Hecquard reports in the first half of the nineteenth century that the Shala tribe had 275 houses and 2,500 inhabitants. In the late-nineteenth century, the region is said to have had over 3,000 inhabitants.⁴

The Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz, who hiked through the Shala region in August 1903, noted the following:

Shala is the strongest and most reputable of the tribes in the Catholic highlands. It consists of 500 households and of about 4,500 souls. These are the people who most strictly hold to blood-feuding and outdated customs. The most evident proof of this were the many destroyed buildings I observed on my way through their territory. They are closely related to the Shoshi who live in the southern part of the valley. In all of the valley there are three missionaries: one in Abat, one in Shoshi and one, since last year, in Theth. The *bajraktar* of Shala lives in Pecaj, above Abat.⁵



Figure 3.4 A Shala bride

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Shala tribe were given as follows: 431 households with a total of 2,512 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Abat, Lekaj, Lotaj, Nënnavriq, Nica, Pecaj and Theth.⁶

The Shala tribesmen were known as herders, farmers and brigands. The valley is well watered and has good pasture land. Maize is the usual crop, although some wheat is grown for local use.

Many Shala families emigrated to the Peja region of western Kosovo. The village of Isniq near Deçan is said to be entirely composed of Shala. Johann Georg von Hahn, who in 1858 travelled through Kosovo, which he calls Dardanian Albania, also noted the presence of Shala people around Vushtrria in northeastern Kosovo:

The Shalj [Shala] constitute the main population of the region of Vuçitërn [Vushtrria] and recognise the Catholic Shala of the northern Albanian Alps as their mother tribe.⁷

Nowadays in Kosovo, the Shala are concentrated primarily around Mitrovica and Trepça, in the hilly region known as Shala of Bajgora

(Shala e Bajgorës), Bajgora being the largest of their 37 settlements. They are divided into four clans or *vllazni*: the Gima, the Peci, the Maleti (related to the Lotaj in Albania proper) and the Lopçi. There are also good numbers of Shala in Isniq, Lluca e Epërme and Strellç i Ulët near Deçan, in Ujmir east of Klina, in Kopiliq i Epërm in Drenica, in Rakosh and Çitak in Podgor, and in several villages of the upper Lepenc valley. Indeed, in smaller numbers they are present throughout Kosovo. Most of them have retained a good sense of tribal identity.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The legendary ancestral father of the Shala tribe was called Zog Diti, son of Dit Murri and grandson of Murr Deti, also known as Murr Dedi. Zog Diti's brother, Mark Diti, was the ancestral father of the closely related Shoshi tribe, and his other brother, Mir Diti, was considered to be the ancestral father of the Mirdita tribe.

According to an alternative but similar oral tradition, the ancestral father of Shala was called Nikë Gjeku, son of Gjek Murrës and grandson of Murrë Dedi. This Nikë Gjeku had four sons: Pec Nika, Lot Nika, Lek Nika and Ded Nika, the first three of whom accordingly founded the settlements of Pecaj, Lotaj and Lekaj. The descendants of Pec Nika subsequently founded several settlements under the slightly altered name of Nicaĵ.⁸

Yet another, though less known, oral tradition describes the Shala descending from an individual called Bal Shiroka.

Together with the neighbouring Shoshi, the Shala had close historical ties with Mirdita. They seem, thus, to have advanced up the Shala valley from the south. Edith Durham dates their arrival in the upper Shala valley to about 1430. As to their connection with Mirdita, Baron Nopcsa noted in the early years of the twentieth century that, not long before his time, the Shala still wore the *dollama*, an almost knee-length smock characteristic of the tribes of Mirdita.⁹ In the eighteenth century, perhaps as a result of persecution by the Muslim authorities, they lived in caves 'without taking confession and without working the fields'.¹⁰ They were, at any rate, among the poorest tribes of the north, yet they were the ones who preserved many of the old traditions. It was here that the famed *kanun* of Lekë Dukagjini was most strictly observed.

The Russian scholar, Julija Vladimirovna Ivanova (1922–2006), who conducted field research in northern Albania in 1956 and 1958, managed to gather some interesting information about the early history of the Shala: At the end of the fourteenth century, there were population movements in the Pashtrik mountain region near Prizren. Part of the population moved into the northern part of the Dukagjin Plateau (Metohija). Another group, including the family of Murr Deti, moved into the mountains of Puka, to the left (south) of the Drin River. This region is also known as Old Dukagjin (*Dukagjini i Vjetër*). A new migration occurred from here in the fifteenth or seventeenth centuries. Part of this population moved over the Lok Pass (Qafa e Lokut) and settled in what is now known as Mirdita. Another part of the population (i.e. the Shala) moved to the southeast banks of Lake Shkodra and, from there, farther northwards up into the Shala Valley. When they arrived there, they encountered an old native population called Mavriqi.¹¹

Shala consisted of four *bajraks*: Theth, Pecaj, Lothaj and Lekaj, the latter three having separated in about 1530. Others, however, divide Shala into three *bajraks*: Shala itself on the left (eastern) bank of the Leshnica River, Gimaj and Theth, with the latter two sometimes being considered tribes in their own right.¹² Edith Durham, for instance, records that the *bajrak* of Theth consisted of 180 houses.¹³ The *bajrak* of Gimaj was usually considered as part of Shala, but was sometimes regarded as entirely independent.

The Shala were known among the mountain tribes for their slyness and cunning, as reflected in the popular saying: ‘The wisdom of the Gashi, the watchfulness of the Krasniqja, the wrath of the Berisha, the heroism of the Kelmendi, the slyness of the Shala, a snake in the grass like the Thaçi’ (*Mênja e Gasbit, sÿni i Krasniqes, inati i Berishës, trimnia e Kelmënit, dredhia e Shaljanit, gjarpnia e Thaçit*).

Travel Impressions

The German geographer, Kurt Hassert, making his way through the mountains of northern Albania in the summer of 1897, was not too thrilled with his visit to Shala:

We then reached the territory of the rapacious Shala who are feared for their savagery, and this for good reason. We were not received hospitably. The moment we got through the dense deciduous forest

and reached Bosh Pass, we were attacked by robbers and 'welcomed' with bullets that whizzed by. As there were six men in our party, our people set off on the attack, led by the audacious Nikola. It was only with great difficulty that we managed to restrain them from doing things that would have resulted in blood feuds and made the continuation of our journey quite impossible [...].

In the poor, scattered settlements, we were pestered and annoyed by the shameless begging and impertinence of the inhabitants. Everyone owned a rifle, but no one owned a shirt. They seemed to change their clothes only when the garments fell off their backs. As a result, they live in incredible filth and the lack of hair on their cleanly shaven heads made their savage and ugly faces look even worse. We were greatly relieved when we got to the clean parsonage of Abat and were heartily welcomed by Father Camillo, a knowledgeable Franciscan from Austrian Trentino. The venerable priest runs one of the most thankless and dangerous parishes because blood-feuding is particularly rampant among the Christian barbarians of Shala and their no less savage Catholic and Muslim neighbours. Only the church offers asylum and refuge, but there are also specific trails where one can travel in safety without being shot. Those who leave the said trails are, however, in mortal danger.

The next day, when we climbed one of the peaks of the Shala range, to a height of 2,019 m., we had to be particularly cautious because the rugged limestone cliffs here constituted the tribal border between Nikaj and Shala. A few nights earlier, the Nikaj had shot four Shala who had fallen asleep at a spring that was outside the confines of the safe trail. From the distance, we could hear the moaning and screaming of their relatives that lasted for several days. It sounded more like the lowing of wild animals than the crying of human beings. When the men had cried their fill and were hoarse, the women took up the repulsive refrain.

Blood-feuding is the worst scourge of Albania. Religion has been unable to moderate it at all. It demands 3,000 victims a year in all of Albania. In High Albania, a full 25% of annual deaths are the result of feuding. It would, however, be wrong to condemn the feuding entirely. In the final analysis, it is a reflection of a certain sense of justice or of legal protection in a country of total anarchy where there is no government authority.

What makes the century-old custom particularly abhorrent, however, is the fact that it is often used simply as a pretext to get rid of rivals and to take possession of their property or their wives. The custom relies to a good extent upon false witness statements and there are many people who are willing to say whatever is needed, generally out of fear of their foes. In addition to this, the feuds affect not only the guilty parties as such, but their innocent male family members, right to the most distant relations. Since, in Albanian thinking, every victim must be avenged, the duty to take revenge passes on from father to son and has led to the eradication of whole families, except in cases where reconciliation was achieved from mutual exhaustion. One is not even safe in one's own home. For this reason, houses are built of solid stone and have embrasures instead of windows. In many villages there are fortified blockhouses with numerous embrasures where the men sleep at night and can defend themselves if attacked.

Feuding has such an impact on the natives that not only families are affected. Whole villages and tribes can be caught up in the vendettas. For this reason, contacts between the tribes have been reduced to nothing. Farming is only possible in the immediately vicinity of a village and wherever there are landmarks, there is fighting. To protect themselves more effectively, many of the tribes or banners join forces for a time and conclude a *besa* or so-called blood friendship. Whenever a member of one of these banners is murdered, the whole tribe is obliged to take revenge by shooting and killing any member of the opposing tribe that they can get their hands on. Since there is no due process of law, many innocent people die instead of the guilty ones, and even foreigners are not completely safe. In cases of extreme animosity, it is regarded as a point of honour to murder guests because the tribe who hosts them is then forced to take revenge twice over.

On our journey the next morning to Sheher i Shoshit, our porters kept their fingers on the triggers of their revolvers. We could only hire them on condition that we took men from two different settlements, because a potential killer would then face revenge from two villages. We climbed 1,000 m. down the

steep slope leading to the Kir Valley and returned to Shkodra in the company of an old woman because none of the men would take us, out of fear of blood feuds. We were relatively safe in her company because no honorable Albanian would ever attack a weak, defenceless and, to boot, unworthy woman, and her companions.

As with most savage and semi-savage peoples, the Albanians accord a subordinate role to their oppressed women. For all their troubles, the women receive little thanks or affection. Their suffering begins the moment they get married. They are the pack-mules of the family because the whole family depends on them. Since men are restricted in their activities because of the blood-feuding, whereas women are inviolable, it is that latter who must do most of the field work and must often hike for days over to the nearest town to exchange their miserly produce for the necessities of life. Nonetheless, they never forget to take their knitting or distaff with them. Even when they are burdened down with the goods they must carry, their hands are always busy.¹⁴

The Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz, who visited the Shala Valley on foot in 1904, recorded the following impressions of the valley and the tribe:

Theth is marked on the maps as a settlement, but this is not completely accurate. It is more of a region. The valley of the Shala River from its source southwards down to the Bosh Pass (Qafa e Boshit) is the territory of the Shala tribe. At Ndërlysa, the valley is interrupted by a ravine several kilometres long through which the river makes its way. The area north of the ravine, the region of the river's source, is called Theth, and the area to the south is known as Shala e Madhe (Greater Shala), or simply Shala. Although both areas belong to the Shala tribe, they live more or less separated from one another and do not regard one another as relatives. Marriages between the two halves of the tribe are thus allowed. Each of the areas has its own missionary. The one in Theth resides in Nrejaj and the one in Shala resides in Abata. Theth comprises the following seven hamlets, 90 houses in all:

Nrejaj, Markdedaj, Gječaj, Nikgjonaj, Okol, Lečaj and Ndërlysa. One is wont to calculate seven souls per household, but for some villages and areas this gives erroneous results because, due to the patriarchal customs of the highlanders, whole extended families can live under one roof. Even if there are several married sons in the family, none of them leave home to build houses of their own. They all continue to live together. In some cases, fifty people can be found living under one roof. It is obvious that such circumstances do not promote proper sanitary conditions. Syphilis is particularly prevalent. Until quite recently, this dreadful scourge was unknown in the Highlands. It was brought in from Shkodra five or six years ago and spread rapidly, promoted by the customs and living conditions of the highlanders but also by a lack of knowledge about the way the disease is spread. Nowhere have any precautionary measures been taken, not even the simplest. The people of Theth are active in herding and farming but the proceeds of the latter activity are not sufficient since there is too little farmland available. The crops consist almost entirely of maize, which is processed at the watermills, of which there are several in the valley. The main food staple is maize flour, and what is lacking is brought in from Peja because it is cheaper there than in Shkodra. Every week a group of villagers from Theth and Shala sets off to get flour which they carry on pack animals or on their own backs. Because of the difficult mountain terrain, the only pack animals used in the valley are mules. They are astoundingly sure-footed and can clamber up difficult rocky slopes like chamois. There are no horses to be found in the Shala Valley, or in the neighbouring areas to the east and south.¹⁵

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Shala, which she visited in the spring of 1908:

The ever-rising track swung round the head of the valley, above the source of the Kiri, and over the Chafa Bashit (some 4000 feet), into Shala. Once up and over, all Shala lay before us and below us, a long, lorn wall of huge, jagged mountains, still snow-capped, with the Lumi Shalit flowing in the valley at their feet.

I daresay you have never heard of Shala. I have looked towards Shala and the beyond for years—the wild heart of a wild land.

Do you know the charm of such a land? It has the charm of childhood. It has infinite possibilities—if it would but grow up the right way. It has crimes and vices; I know them all (that is to say, I trust there are not any more). But it has primitive virtues, without many of the meannesses of what is called civilisation. It is uncorrupted by luxury. It is cruel—but so is Nature. It is generous as a child that gives you its sweets. It can be trusting and faithful. And it plays its own mysterious games, that no grown-ups can hope to understand. [...]

We descended to the river's bank by Gimaj, a village of Shala, and followed up the valley. The river became a torrent, leaping from rock to rock—the pine-clad mountains towered on either hand, and the houses were all *kulas*—tall stone towers, loopholed for rifles.

A final ascent brought us to the plain of Thethi, a grandly wild spot where the valley opens out. The ground is cultivated, and well watered by cunning little canals. Great isolated boulders are scattered over it, on which stand *kulas*.

The eyes, some one has said, are the windows of the soul. In extreme wrath, at fighting-point, when a man goes white and strikes, the pupils of his eyes contract to black specks. So do the blank, windowless walls of the *kulas*, with their tiny loopholes, stand ever threatening.

I think no place where human beings live has given me such an impression of majestic isolation from all the world. It is a spot where the centuries shrivel; the river might be the world's well-spring, its banks the fit home of elemental instincts—passions that are red and rapid.

A great square-topped cliff on the left was covered with broken fir trunks, torn down by a heavy snow-slide in the winter. Bleached and white in the sun, they lay scattered like the bones of the dead. Others stood erect and gaunt. 'It is the altar of God, with candles upon it!' cried one of the men who was with me.

At the very end of the valley rises the range of mountains called the Prokletija (the Accursed Mountains), so named, I was told in Shala and Lower Pulati, because it was over them that the

Turk came into High Albania. Other routes seem more possible; but for my own part I believe in local tradition. And the bitter truth remains that over all the land is still the curse of Turkish influence. [...]

Local tradition in Shala tells that three hundred and seventy-six years ago (*i.e.* in 1532) the bariak of Shala had sufficiently increased in numbers to be divided into three main 'houses'—Petsaj, Lothaj, and Lekaj—which, as separate bariaks, still exist. This is evidence that at that date they must have been settled for some time. Lothaj and Lekaj have recently decided that they are sufficiently far removed to be intermarriageable. But Petsaj still refuses on the ground of consanguinity.

The bariak of Thethi consists of 180 houses, of which 80 form the village of Okolo at the extreme end of the valley.

Thethi can, and does, grow enough maize for its own support, and has passed a law strictly forbidding the export of any, as has all Shala. The only near maize-supply is the Moslem Gusinje, and in case of that being cut off by 'blood' or war, there is no nearer supply than Scutari, a dear and distant market.

Life at Thethi was of absorbing interest. I forgot all about the rest of the world, and having paid off and dismissed the *kirijee* and horses, there seemed no reason why I should ever return. [...]

The days passed. I visited dark *kulas* perched on rocks, and met everywhere the same frank hospitality and courtesy, though it weighed on my soul that I was receiving it under false pretences; for, in spite of my frequent and emphatic denials, all Thethi persisted in believing me to be the sister of the King of England come to free them, and addressing me always as *Kralitse* (Queen).¹⁶

Figures of Note

Mehmet Shpendi

Highland warrior Mehmet Shpendi (1851–1915), born in Pecaj, was a noted warrior of Shala from the time of the League of Prizren (1878). He headed the *Djelmnia e Shalës* (Young Men of Shala) after its formation. Shpendi is remembered, in particular, for his resistance to the Young Turks when General Shefket Turgut Pasha invaded the mountains in 1910

with the express purpose of exterminating the highlanders and settling Bosnian emigrants along the Turkish–Montenegrin border in their place.¹⁷ It was at that time, at the battle of Qafa e Agrit (July 1910), that he led 3,000 men from throughout Dukagjin against Turkish infantry and artillery. Edith Durham spoke of him in 1911 as follows:

Mehmet Shpend (Mehmet the Raven), a Catholic, in spite of his Moslem name, one of the most influential of the Shala headmen, was another notable. A strange, wild creature, dark-eyed, lithe in spite of his years, decked with silver chains, and the silver and crimson waistcoat, which is characteristic of his district, he played a great part in the insurrection. Of Mehmet it is told that once, when crossing a pass that was deep in snow, he and his wife found a perishing lamb. Mehmet at once gave it to his wife to suckle, and they took it safely home. Shala had blocked the passes with hewn trees last year, and Mehmet and a small following had subsequently refused to yield up their arms. They took to the heights, and the Turks burnt their houses as punishment. To Mehmet, Shala was the centre of the world. He could grasp no external politics. That a great Power should come to Shala's rescue was all his desire, and if only Shala could get a sufficiency of arms, it would be invincible. The whole of Shala-Shoshi was ready, said Mehmet, but Montenegro had not given the promised weapons. He prayed me to ask help of England. Nor could he, nor any of them, understand that England would only give help where she expected gain, for they always declared themselves ready to serve the King of England loyally. Mehmet, like the rest of the Malsors, was wholly ignorant of the science of war, but an adept in the art of stalking and sniping small Turkish outposts, and the capture of their rifles and cartridge belts filled his soul with joy.¹⁸

The Shoshi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Shoshi tribal region is situated in the Dukagjin area north of the Drin River in the District of Shkodra in northern Albania. Its land stretches through the mountainous countryside on the right (western)

side of the Shala River, south of Shala land. Shoshi thus borders on the traditional tribal regions of Shala to the north, Toplana and Dushmani to the east, Shllaku to the south, and Kiri to the west. The main settlements of Shoshi are: Brashta, Nicaj-Shosh, Palaj, and Pepsuj, with Ndreaj serving as its administrative centre.

Population

The term Shoshi was recorded as *Sosi* in 1671 in the ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari and as *Sciossi* in the 1672 report of Giorgio Vladagni. The name was recorded in Italian again in 1703 as *Sciosci*, and as *Scosei* on the 1821 map of French diplomat Hugues Pouqueville. The term is said to be related to Alb. *shoshë* 'winnowing screen, sieve', but this is doubtful. It is more likely that the toponym Shosh is derived from Saint Cyriacus (Alb. *Shën Qurk*; Ital. *San Ciriaco*), who is the patron saint of the region.¹⁹

The Shoshi tribe was a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor. The tribe was known for its pride (*Shoshi krenin*).

The Shoshi, like the Shala, are an entirely Catholic tribe. The patron saint of the Shoshi region, Saint Cyriacus (Shën Qurk), is commemorated on 13 or 15 July at a feast called 'Qurku i Shoshit' (Cyriacus of Shoshi). However, according to Edith Durham, it was Saint Bonaventura they celebrated, whose feast day is also 15 July.²⁰ The Franciscans first arrived in Shoshi in 1636 and settled there definitively in 1705.²¹

As regards population statistics, the apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported: 'The village of Shoshi has 30 homes and 250 souls. There is a church here dedicated to Saint Henry, built of stone and in good condition.'²²

In his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains' in 1841, Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gives the population of Shoshi as 1,600, of whom 400 were men in arms.²³

The French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard reported in the first half of the nineteenth century that the Shoshi tribe had 170 houses and 1,500 inhabitants.²⁴

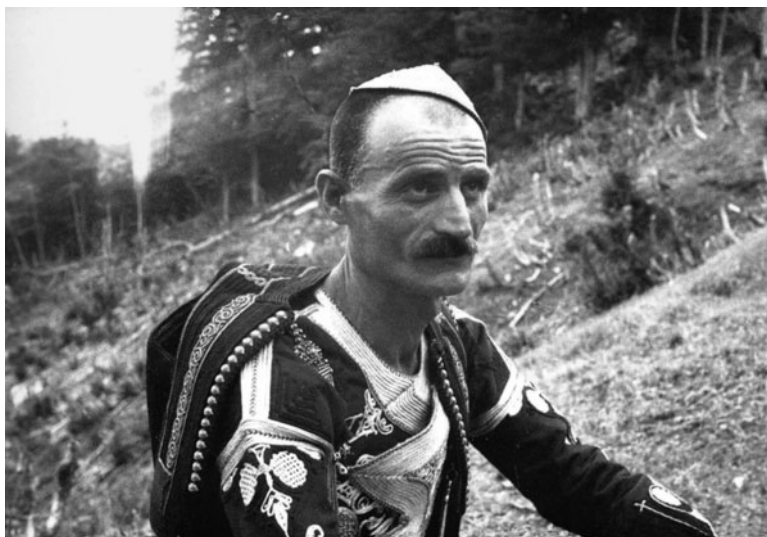


Figure 3.5 Kolë Vatë Mirashi of the Shoshi tribe

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Shoshi tribe were given as follows: 272 households with a total of 1,293 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Brashta, Cilikok, Ndreaj, Ndrejginaj and Prekal.²⁵ In 2008 Shoshi had a population of 1,716.

In Kosovo, there are Shoshi settlements in the region of Deçan.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The legendary ancestral father of the Shoshi tribe was called Mark Diti, who was son of Dit Murri and the grandson of Murr Deti, also known as Murr Dedi. Mark Diti's brother, Zog Diti, was the ancestral father of the closely related Shala tribe, and his other brother, Mir Diti, was the ancestral father of the related Mirdita tribe.

The Shoshi, like the Shala, are said to have settled the land in a northwards migration from Mirdita. They are said to have established themselves originally in Kodra e Shën Qurkut under the leadership of Gjol and Pep Suma, the grandsons of Mark Diti.²⁶ The Shoshi intermarried with neither Shala nor Mirdita. As one of the main Dukagjin tribes, they may have an original tie to the mediaeval Dukagjini family.

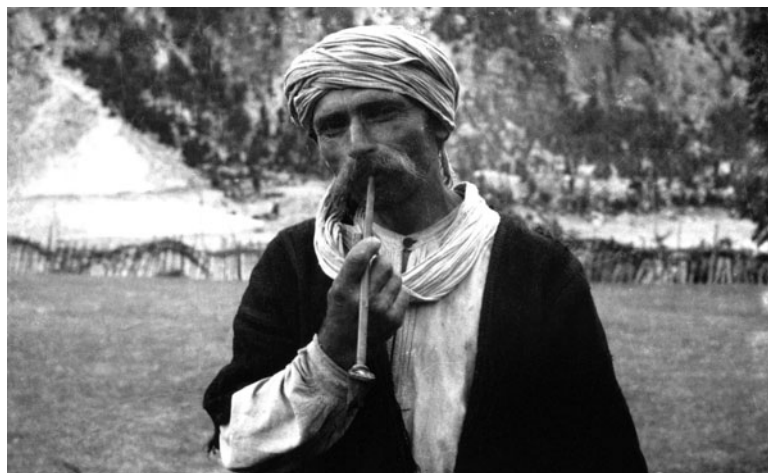


Figure 3.6 Well-moustached member of the Shoshi tribe

Much of their local legendry is, at any rate, connected to the figure of Lekë Dukagjini (1410–81), comrade-in-arms and later rival of Scanderbeg. The forested area of Kodra e Shëngjergjit, which was once regarded as the capital of all of Dukagjin (including Shala, Shoshi, Pulati, Nikaj and Mërturi), is situated in Shoshi territory.

Travel Impressions

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Shoshi, which she visited in the spring of 1908:

We left for Shoshi early next morning, walked down a steep descent to the river, which we crossed on a high wooden bridge protected by a shrine to St. Antony. Following the right bank of the Shala River a little way, we struck up the hill through most magnificent chestnut forests. Shala, under better law, might be a happy valley. It has a superlative water-supply, springs that bubble crystal-clear from out the rock; it is well timbered, and such cultivable land as it has is very fertile. Nor is there any lack of pasture for flocks. We passed many big *kulas*, and the fields of sprouting maize were all guarded by wooden crosses painted white.

Descending, we crossed a small stream, a tributary of the Shala River, ascended, and arrived at Kisha Shoshit, the church of Shoshi.

The Franciscan (a Tyrolese from the Italian-speaking district), who has spent a large part of his life with Shala-Shoshi, has been collecting and transcribing manuscripts from the churches, and painfully putting together details that throw light on the history of the country. But so many churches have been burned, with all that they contained, that records are few. The earliest he showed me was of 1648, and recorded the assassination that year of five Franciscans; one at Podgoritza. [...]

According to local tradition, it was to Shoshi that the hero, Lek Dukaghin, came on fleeing from Rashia. A rock – Guri Lek Dukaghinit – that stands high on the hillside across the valley, marks the spot where he first stayed.²⁷

The Shllaku Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Shllaku tribal region is situated in the District of Shkodra north of the Drin River and south of Mount Cukali, about halfway between Shkodra and Koman in northern Albania. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Drishti and Shoshi to the north, Dushmani to the east, and Qerreti to the south across the Drin River. The main settlements of Shllaku are: Barcolla, Bena, Kroni i Madh, Palaj, Ukbibaj and Vukaj, and its small administrative centre is now Vukjakaj-Gegaj.

Population

The name Shllaku was recorded in 1641 as *Scelacu* in a report submitted to the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in Rome by the early Albanian church figure, Frang Bardhi (Francesco Bianchi). The Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich, records the form *Scelaku* in 1703. The term probably derives from the name of a saint, perhaps Saint Luke.

The Shllaku tribe were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of one *bajrak*. It was and is an entirely Catholic tribe.

Edith Durham, who visited the region in 1908, described it as follows: 'Shllaku tribe consists of about three hundred houses, all Christian. It is an offshoot of the tribe of Toplana. A third of it lives by charcoal-burning, the others by keeping goats. There is very little cultivable land.'²⁸

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Shllaku and Mazreku tribes together were as follows: 276 households with a total of 2,023 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Barcolla, Mazrek, Vukaj and Vukjakaj.²⁹

In 1922, Shllaku had a population of 1,500 and, in 2008, it had a population of 1,595.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

As a tribe, Shllaku is said to be an offshoot of the Toplana. Baron Nopcsa, who inquired about the origins of the tribe around 1907, reported the following:

The earliest ancestor of the Shllaku, a certain Gabeti or Gabeta, is said to have come from Montenegro and was of Orthodox faith. When he arrived in Shllaku, he came across the original native population who were the ancestors of the Kolë Pep Fura family and whose last male descendant died about 1900. [...] The original population of Shllaku was apparently called Lorehic and is said to be related to the family of the same name in Guri i Zi on the plain of Shkodra. The said Gabeti had two sons: Gjergj Gabeti [who was the ancestral father of the Mëgulla tribe], and Can Gabeti [who was the ancestral father of the Shllaku tribe]. The eldest son of Can Gabeti was Jak Cani who is remembered as the oldest in the lineage of the most distinguished family of Shllaku. The inhabitants of Gushta, for their part, stemmed from the younger lineage founded by Kolë Cani.³⁰

The earliest named ancestor of the Shllaku was thus Can Gabeti. He was the younger brother of the unnamed ancestral father of the Toplana, and the brother of Gjergj Gabeti, the ancestral father of the Mëgulla tribe. The Gashi tribe also seems to be related to this old family who originally lived in Shllaku where they had land.

As concerns economic activity, there was a small copper mine in Palaj, and some charcoal is still produced in the region. However, as with other areas of the northern mountains, much of the population of Shllaku has left the region and lives in Shkodra as there is little work in the mountains.

Travel Impressions

Poverty and misery were the impressions gained of Shllaku by Baron Alexandre Degrand (1844–1911), who served as French consul in Shkodra from 1893 to 1899, when he visited the region:

I arrived in Shllaku without too much difficulty by horse in six hours, of which at least two were spent walking on foot. The trail was relatively good up to an elevation of 800 m. and the descent down into Shllaku, which is situated at an altitude of 600 m. was more exhausting than dangerous. The tribe in these mountains is poor indeed. All they have to live on is a small bit of good agricultural land and charcoal, which the women lug into town and sell, and then return with the flour they procure there.

In all of my travels, I have never encountered such a wretched tribe. The poor make up the majority of the inhabitants, and one woman told me in tears that she had no way of making clothes to be buried in. These women are nonetheless very attractive. Here, as elsewhere in High Albania alas, vendetta rages. The parish priest who showed us around pointed out the spot where once a year, at Easter, he celebrates mass outdoors. The parish church is too small to hold all the faithful. This year, at the very moment he turned to the congregation to bless them at the end of the service, a young mountain man, having caught sight of a fellow who had killed one of his relatives, judged the moment to be opportune to take revenge as custom required. He fired and killed the fellow with one shot. Other shots rang out immediately, fired by the relatives and friends of the victim and the murderer. Before the priest could intervene, he told me, there were eleven people dying in the meadow. Among them were two women who had been hit by mistake. He hardly had time to administer last rites to the dying men who called for his assistance in the midst of the crowd still stunned by the awful consequences of the insane deed. Their tombs

now covered the earth around us. If it were not for the sinister memory of the murders that took place there three days ago, it would be a pleasant place to spend the day. The clearing is surrounded by trees on all sides and the nightingales were singing without pause. It was cool out and everywhere there were flowers and creeping tendrils.³¹

Poverty and misery were what struck Edith Durham, too, during her visit to Shllaku in the spring of 1908:

From here onward the country was barer and barer, rocky and waterless; the houses were few and wretched. And we came to Kisha Shlakut (Church of Shlaku) about five in the evening. The village—some dozen scattered houses—is called Lot Gegaj.

The priest was absent—had been sent for up country.

I have been in many melancholy spots, but Lot Gegaj is one of the worst. All around the parsonage was a desolation of huge slabs of rock. It splits in narrow strata, and the cleavage is so sharp that it appears machine-cut—the remnants of a giant factory of roofing slabs. Only the scantiest vegetation manages to cling in the crevices. Deep down below flowed the Drin, turbid and yellow, half empty, with bare tracts of shingle on either side, but still flowing rapidly between the forbidding flanks of the grim valley. [...]

Three months' unbroken drought, destined to last three more, had already brought the people to dire straits. It took two hours to fetch a small barrel of water to the church, and other houses were much farther away. The wretched, half-starved goats and sheep were driven to water once in twenty-four hours. Shlaku tribe consists of about three hundred houses, all Christian. It is an offshoot of the tribe of Toplana. A third of it lives by charcoal-burning, the others by keeping goats. There is very little cultivable land.

One sample of the life of grinding misery will suffice. A man—most honest and hard-working—supported himself, his widowed sister-in-law, and her child, by charcoal-burning. Weekly, he took as much as he could carry, and drove a loaded donkey down to Scutari, exchanging the charcoal for the maize upon which

they lived. But he fell ill, and entrusted his donkey to a neighbour, who ill-treated it, and the wretched beast died. Ill, he crawled to Scutari with all the charcoal he could carry, but it was no longer enough to buy the week's food. Only by spending a whole day in the town and begging scraps of food, which he carried home, could they manage to live. A Scutarene took pity on him, and gave him enough maize to sow his little field. He sowed it, but the cruel drought killed almost the whole of it. The sickly, underfed child and its mother—who was crippled with acute rheumatism—could do nothing to help in the charcoal-burning. And thus do folk in Shlaku drag out a miserable existence.³²

Figures of Note

Bernardin Palaj

Bernardin Palaj (1894–1946), who was born in the mountains of Shllaku, was a Catholic folklorist and poet. He attended a Franciscan school in Shkodra, joined the Franciscan order in September 1911, and finished his education in Salzburg (Austria). Ordained as a priest in 1918, Palaj was an organist at the Franciscan church in Shkodra from 1916 to 1946, taught Albanian and Latin at the Collegium Illyricum (Illyrian College), and served as a parish priest in Pulat and Rubik. From April 1923 to December 1924, together with Shuk Gurakuqi (1888–1967), Ndre Mjeda (1866–1937), Gjergj Fishta (1871–1940) and Anton Harapi (1888–1946), he edited the Shkodra weekly newspaper *Ora e maleve* (*The Mountain Ora*), affiliated with the parliamentary opposition. He was arrested by Ahmet Zogu (1895–1961) around 1924 but was released upon the intervention of Archbishop Lazër Mjeda (1869–1935). In the period 1919–34, he collected folklore from the mountains, material that was published in the leading periodical *Hylli i Dritës* (*The Day-Star*). Together with Donat Kurti (1903–83), he published *Kângë kreshnikësh dhe legenda* (*Songs of the Frontier Warriors and Legends*) in the impressive *Visaret e kombit* (*Treasures of the Nation*) collection, Tirana 1937. From 1934 to 1941, he also increasingly produced literary works of his own, mostly classical lyric and elegiac verse and short stories. From 1939 to 1944, Palaj served as a police captain under Italian rule and German occupation, though he was apparently ill from 1942 onwards. He also devoted the war years to

research on customary law and tribal organisation in the northern mountains. His police work under the occupation, whatever form it took, did not endear him to the partisans. With the communist takeover in late 1944, Palaj fled into the mountains, but was arrested in Rubik in 1946. Bernardin Palaj died in prison of tetanus in February or December 1946 before he could be sentenced, and was buried in the courtyard of the sanatorium in Shkodra.

Marie Shllaku

The political activist and nationalist figure of the World War II period, Marie Shllaku (1922–46) was born in Shkodra of a Catholic family from the Shllaku tribal region. She received a Catholic education from the Stigmatine Sisters in Shkodra and studied at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Rome during the Italian occupation. In 1942 she returned to Tirana where she got a job with the ministry of public works. On 25 November of that year, during the ephemeral unification of Albania and Kosovo, she was seconded to Prizren as a ministerial finance inspector. In November 1943 she was back in Tirana where she worked as secretary to the minister of the interior, Xhafer Deva, until May 1944. The focus of her interests was now Kosovo where, after a brief visit to Shkodra, she returned, committed to defending ethnic Albania (i.e. unification). There she worked with political leader Ymer Berisha and was associated in Drenica with the anticommunist Albanian National Democratic Organisation (*Organizata Nacional Demokratike Shqiptare*). With Shaban Polluzha and Ymer Berisha, she played an active role in resistance against the increasingly victorious communist partisans in August 1945 and, on 12 September of that year, she took part in fighting in Siqeva (Drenica) where she was seriously wounded. At the end of the year, she and 26 other members of the Albanian National Democratic Organisation were arrested by the communist security forces who beat and tortured her. On 15 July 1946, after a mock 13-day trial in Prizren, she was sentenced to death. The prosecutor, Ali Shukrija, ranted at her during the proceedings, stating that she was unfit to be shot and should be burnt alive. Her final words in court were: 'One day, your sons and daughters will be ashamed of your treachery and the inhumanity you have shown to us and the whole Albanian people.'

Marie Shllaku was sent to a firing squad at the age of 23. Her place of burial is unknown.

The Mazreku Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Mazreku (formerly also Mazareku) tribal region is situated in the District of Shkodra in northern Albania. It is located on the right (northern) side of the Drin River, now the Vau i Dejës artificial lake, about 10 kilometres directly east of Shkodra. Mazreku borders on the traditional tribal regions of Shllaku to the north and east, on Drishti and Boksi to the west, and on the Drin River to the south. The main settlement of Mazreku is the village of Mazrek.

Population

The name of this tribe was recorded as *Maserecu* in 1641 in the ecclesiastical report of the Albanian bishop of Sappa and Sarda, Frang Bardhi (Francesco Bianchi), and as *Masareccu* in 1703 in a report of the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich. The word comes from the Albanian *mbas rekës* 'behind or beyond the river, *transfluvium*'. This toponym also occurs in Greece: *Μαζαρακιά* and *Μαζαρακιά* in Epirus.

The Mazreku tribe was a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of one *bajrak*.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The Mazreku were a small Catholic tribe related closely to Shllaku. They regarded themselves as autochthonous on their territory and claimed in 1907 to know the names of their ancestral fathers for 14 generations back.³³

The Dushmani Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Dushmani tribal region is situated on the right (northern) bank of the Drin River in the present District of Shkodra in northern Albania.

It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Shoshi to the west and northwest, Toplana to the northeast, Berisha and Kabashi across the Drin River to the east, and Shllaku to the southwest. The main villages of Dushmani, all tiny settlements, are Vila, Arrëz, and Telumë-Kllögjën.

Population

The term Dushmani may have been recorded in the sixth century by the early Byzantine geographer and scholar Procopius of Caesarea (ca. 500–ca. 565) as *Dousmanes* who uses this name to refer to a Thracian-Illyrian castle restored by the Emperor Justinian. It occurs with more certainty a millennium later in a Turkish document as *Düşman* in 1581, and as *Dusimani* on the maps of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli in 1688 and 1691. One is reminded of the Turkish oriental term *dushman* ‘enemy, foe’, but there does not seem to be any etymological relationship to the Turkish here. Dushmani also occurs as a family name. Edith Durham records a document from 1403 which mentions ‘Goranimus, Damianus and Nenada, brothers Dusmani, Lords of Polati Minor’ who offered themselves as subjects of Venice and swore fidelity on condition that Venice guarantee them possession of their lands.³⁴ Baron Nopcsa believed the name was more likely to be a link between the Albanian personal name Dush, Latin Dussus, and Albanian personal name Mani, the latter being recorded in 1319.³⁵

The Dushmani tribe was a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of two *bajraks*, Dushmani and Temali. The *bajrak* of Dushmani was also occasionally known as the *bajrak* of Dushamir.

Dushmani is a Catholic tribe. The patron saint of Dushmani was John the Baptist (*Shën Gjon*), whose feast day, normally on 24 June or 7 January, was celebrated there on 13–14 June. The church and parsonage of the Catholic parish of Dushmani were built at the foot of Mount Cukali in 1745.³⁶

As to population statistics, the French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard reported in the first half of the nineteenth century that the Dushmani tribe had 145 houses and 1,200 inhabitants. It had a population of about 1,400 in the late nineteenth century. Edith Durham counted 160 houses while she was in Dushmani in 1908: ‘Of these no fewer than forty were, at the time of my visit, in blood within the tribe. As for external bloods, they were countless.’³⁷

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Dushmani (and Temali) tribe were given as follows: 181 households with a total of 939 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Dushman, Qerreti i Temalit, Teluma e Dushmanit (Telumë-Klllogjën) and Temal.³⁸

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The Dushmani tribe, said to be originally from the area of Tuz, south of Podgorica in Montenegro, was related to the Thaçi tribe. According to Baron Nopcsa, when they arrived in their current homeland, the Dushmani found it inhabited by the Lumabardhi (White River) tribe, which was said to be related to Toplana and Gashi. The arrival of the Dushmani forced the Lumabardhi tribe eastwards, to the region of Peja in Kosovo. Nopcsa was able to trace the genealogical ancestry of the Dushmani for five or six generations back to 1750.³⁹ The Dushmani intermarry with Shllaku and Shala.

Travel Impressions

Edith Durham, who called the Dushmani 'one of the wilder tribes',⁴⁰ described her impressions from a visit in the spring of 1908 as follows:

Then came a very deep descent, and we saw the church of Dushmani far below on a little green oasis, and lower still the river Drin, all walled in by grim, iron-grey ramparts of rock.

Dushmani—consisting of two bariaks, Dushmani and Temali—is one of the wilder tribes.

It is part of the district of Postripa. Postripa consists of Mazreku, Drishti, Shlaku, and Dushmani. Ecclesiastically all are included in the diocese of Pulati, but are not properly part of the Pulati group. Dushmani takes its name from Paul Dushman, a chieftain of the fifteenth century. Dushman is a Turkish word, meaning enemy—possibly a nickname given him by the Turks. The tribe is wholly Christian.

The bariak of Dushmani consists of a hundred and sixty houses. Of these no fewer than forty were, at the time of my visit, in blood within the tribe. As for external bloods, they were countless.

Dushmani believes in Lek Dukaghin as the One-that-must-be-obeyed, and that he ordered blood-vengeance. The teaching of

Christ, the laws of the Church, fall on deaf ears when the law of Lek runs counter to them. But they believed vaguely in the symbol of Christianity, for I found, on asking, that most men had a tiny cross tattooed upon the breast or upper arm. Then, in case of being found dead in a strange place, they would be certain of Christian burial.

Yet many of the grave-slabs in Dushmani churchyard are rudely scored with mysterious patterns in which the sun and crescent moon almost invariably occur, and the cross seldom—the symbols of the pre-Christian beliefs that still influence the people. I vainly and repeatedly asked for their meaning, but only met the old answer, '*Per bukur*' (For ornament). No other graveyard yielded me so many of these, but I could not hear that the sun and moon were ever a tattoo pattern here as in other parts.

Bones, and fragments of them, were strewn all over the place. The explanation was that a huge feast has to be held before each funeral. Any one in the tribe can come to it, and, owing to the long distances that folk have to journey, it is very late before the interment takes place. It is, therefore, often half dark before—the feast is over—the relatives of the deceased dig the grave, and they dig heedlessly anywhere, digging up the former remains. There appears to be a great prejudice against digging the grave some time before, as various unlucky things may happen to it. No one may step across it, nor may it be left empty—something made of iron must be placed in it—was all that I could learn.

One of the tribe bloods has lasted for five generations. The chief man in this feud—grey-eyed and fair-haired, but with the other physical characteristics of the local dark type—lamented his position bitterly. Five generations were too much. The quarrel had had nothing whatever to do with him, but he was liable to be shot for it after all these years. I asked why he did not pay blood-gelt and compound the feud. He replied indignantly that his side was the innocent one, so why should it pay?

The Franciscan—priest of Dushmani—laughed heartily. 'They are all innocent!' he said, 'every one of them, according to their own account, and all at blood with some one or other.' He added that because of 'blood' they would very rarely come to confession. His own servant, for example, had killed three.⁴¹

Figures of Note

Martin Camaj

The Albanian scholar, linguist and writer Martin Camaj (1925–92) was an emigrant writer of significance both to Albanian scholarship and to modern Albanian prose and poetry. Born in the village of Temal, in the Dushmani region, he attended the Jesuit Saverian College in Shkodra from 1935 to 1946. He seems to have taught at a school in Prekal for a while and then in 1949 managed to escape over the border to Montenegro. In Tuz, he taught school again and in the summer of 1949 he attended a three-month teacher training course in Peja. In 1950, Camaj began studies at the University of Belgrade. After graduation in Romance philology in 1955, he continued postgraduate studies at the University of Sarajevo under the ailing Professor Henrik Barić (1888–1957) and completed a doctoral thesis on the language of Gjon Buzuku in 1956. In September 1956, he was in Rome as a student of Ernest Koliqi (1903–75), who held the chair of Albanian language and literature at the University of Rome. There he taught Albanian and finished his education in linguistics with a *dottore in lettere con lode* degree from the University of Rome in March 1960, again with a dissertation on the language of Buzuku. In December 1960, Camaj got a German scholarship to continue his studies in Munich under ethnologist Alois Schmaus (1901–70) and, after receiving his *venia legendi* in January 1965, he began lecturing in Albanian studies. From 1970 to September 1990, he was full professor of Albanian studies at the University of Munich and lived in the mountain village of Lenggries in Upper Bavaria until his death on 12 March 1992.

Martin Camaj's academic research focused on the Albanian language and its dialects, in particular those of southern Italy. He was also active in the field of folklore. He began his literary career with poetry, a genre to which he remained faithful throughout his life, though in later years, he devoted himself increasingly to prose. He relied on the traditional and colourful linguistic fountainhead of his native Gheg dialect to convey a poetic vision of his pastoral mountain birthplace near the Drin River, with its sparkling streams and shining forests. His verse has appeared in English in the volumes *Selected Poetry*, (New York, 1990), and *Palimpsest*, (Munich, 1991). General themes

that occur in Martin Camaj's work are the loss of tradition, loneliness in a changing world and the search for one's roots. Needless to say, his works only became known to the Albanian public after the fall of the communist dictatorship. Up until then, only a handful of people in Albania had ever heard of him.

The Toplana Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Toplana tribal region is situated on the right (northern) bank of the Drin River in the very eastern part of the District of Shkodra in northern Albania. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Shoshi to the west, Mërturi to the northeast, Berisha to the southeast across the Drin River, and Dushmani across the Leshnica River to the southwest. It is still a very isolated region. The main settlements of Toplana include Serma and Toplana.

Population

The term Toplana occurs as *Toplana* in 1671 in the ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari. We find the form *Toplaia* in 1688 and 1689 on the maps of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola, and the forms *Toplana* and *Toplaia* in 1688 and 1691 on the maps of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli. The Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich, records the form *Toplana* in 1703, and *Toplaia* occurs on the 1821 map of French diplomat Hugues Pouqueville. The tribal designation seems to be derived from a Slavic toponym, related to BCS *topao* 'warm'.

The Toplana tribe was a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of one *bajrak*.

The Toplana were a Catholic tribe. Their patron saint was Saint George (*Shën Gjergj*), whose feast day was celebrated on 22–23 April. The feast day of Saint George marked the beginning of summer. Indeed in the old days it marked the beginning of the new year and was associated with numerous popular customs, most of which were designed to ensure growth in children, farm animals and crops. Shepherds gathered flowers and herbs on Saint George's Day and fed

them to the farm animals, which were adorned with ivy leaves and 'smoked' with incense. The parish church of Toplana was built in 1696 on the mountainside, on the right bank of the Drin.⁴²

The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported:

The village of Toplana has 22 houses and 120 souls. In this village there are 5 churches: Saint George which is structurally the most beautiful, the church of the Assumption of the Virgin, the Church of Saint Nicholas embellished with various statues that were taken from those in the town, the church of Saint Catherine and the church of Saint Veneranda. All these churches are built of stone walls and are in good condition with regard to building material. The Eucharist is not held here, and they are all without vestments or holy furnishings.⁴³

As to population statistics, the French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard reported in the first half of the nineteenth century that the Toplana tribe consisted of 53 houses. It seems to have had a population of about 400 in the late nineteenth century.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Toplana tribe were given as follows: 52 households with a total of 254 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Serma and Toplana.⁴⁴

Among the noted families of Toplana are the: Ndrepepaj, Lekaj, Geraj, Bicaj, Malutaj, Gjoklekaj, Gjomicaj, Mertiaj, Kolicaj and Prezhmeshaj.

Baron Nopcsa, who made a survey of death statistics among all the Catholic tribes of the north covering the years 1894 to 1904, and on whom Edith Durham probably based her information, found that the parish of Toplana had the highest percentage of violent deaths (42.3 per cent) of all the tribes.⁴⁵ Relying again on her friend Nopcsa, Durham notes that the Toplana were a very wild tribe: 'Toplana holds a sinister record; its annual death-rate from gunshot wounds is double that of most other Christian tribes.'⁴⁶

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Baron Nopcsa, who investigated the origins of the Toplana tribe in about 1907, reported the following:

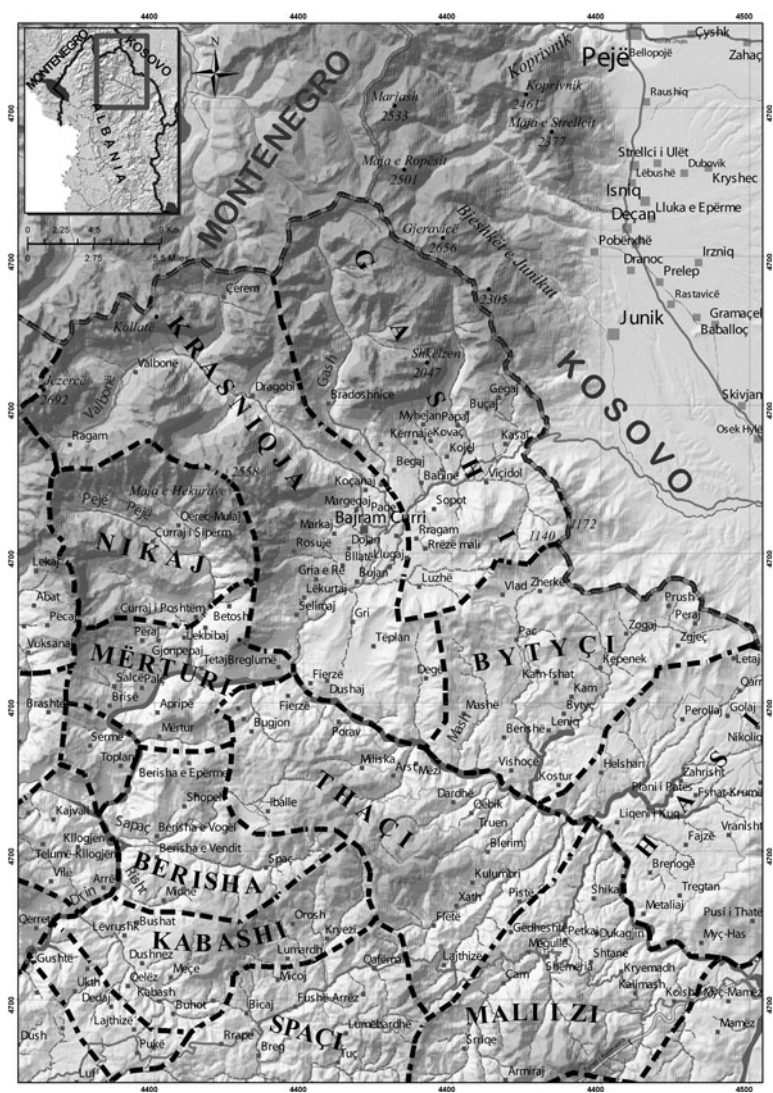
The Toplana tribe would seem to be very old. The ancestral father of Toplana, whose name I do not know, was the younger brother of Can Gabeti, the ancestral father of the Shllaku. Can Gabeti lived 14 or 15 generations ago. He had another brother called Gjergj Gabeti who was the ancestral father of the Mëgulla tribe. A fourth brother, whose name is not known, was the ancestral father of the Gashi tribe. [...] The four brothers originally lived in the Shllaku region. [...] The genealogy of the Toplana comprises 13 generations. The emigration of the Gashi and Toplana from Shllaku must therefore have taken place around 1524 or perhaps somewhat earlier, probably as a result of the first Turkish war in Albania. When the Toplana reached their current location, it was of course already inhabited. The original native population was gradually driven out and limited to the present village of Gjuraj. The name Gjuraj reminds one of the Slavic Djuro. One interesting colonisation in the eighteenth century had its origins in Toplana. Pep Marku of Toplana emigrated to Iballja and displaced the Gruda to the hamlet of Koprat in Iballja, whose inhabitants even today wear the costume of Toplana in the midst of a larger community that dresses itself in Gjakovar fashion.⁴⁷

Edith Durham learned from Nopcsa that the Toplana came to their present site from Vasojević tribal territory. The Slavic Vasojević tribe is said to have shifted its ground from somewhere near Foča in Herzegovina to Medun, near Podgorica, and thence to its present site. In one of these shifts, she concludes, it probably drove Toplana out.⁴⁸ She agreed, at any rate, that 'it is a very old tribe. Shllaku and Gashi are both offshoots of it.'⁴⁹

Travel Impressions

Johann Georg von Hahn, who travelled up the Drin valley in the summer of 1863, recorded that the Toplana were extremely poor:

It was here that we came across the first naked children, who go unclothed all winter, too. Only the men had shirts on. The women wear their originally white, and now sallow brownish woollen dresses right on their bodies. Grisebach states of these people, in the style of Tacitus, 'No man of Dukagjin owns a shirt, but all of them have rifles.' This is true not only for the people of Dukagjin, but for all of their northern neighbours, too. In the northern mountains, however, shirts have apparently started making inroads in recent times, together with the red fez.⁵⁰



The tribal regions of the Gjakova Highlands

CHAPTER 4

THE TRIBES OF THE GJAKOVA HIGHLANDS (*MALËSIA E GJAKOVËS*)

The Nikaj Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Nikaj tribal region is situated north of the Drin River in the western part of the District of Tropoja in northern Albania. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Shala to the west, Krasniqja to the north and east, and Mërturi to the south. The Nikaj live primarily on the right (west) side of the Curraj/Nikaj River that flows into the Drin. The left (eastern) bank constitutes the border with Krasniqja for much of the river's upper course. The main settlements of Nikaj are: Lekbibaj which serves as its administrative centre, Gjonpepaj, Peraj, Curraj i Poshtëm, Curraj i Epërm, Qereç-Mulaj and Shëngjergj.

Population

The term Nikaj was recorded as *Nicagni* in 1671 in the ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari, and as *Nicagni* and *Nichagni* in 1703 by the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich. As a tribal and family name, which also may occur in an Ottoman land register in 1485, it would seem to be related to the Latin and Italian personal name *Nicola* 'Nicholas'.

The Nikaj are a primarily Catholic tribe. The patron saint of the Nikaj was Saint Sebastian, known in Albanian as *Shën Mastjan*, *Shën*

Mashjan or simply *Shmashjan*. His feast, Alb. *Nata e Shmashjanit* (the Night of Saint Sebastian), also called *Shmashjani i Nikajve* (Saint Sebastian of the Nikaj), is observed there on 19–20 January. The parish of Nikaj dates from 1827 but the church and parsonage burned down in 1867. A new church was then built by the Franciscans.¹ Although the Nikaj were Catholics, Muslim names were common among them. Many of them, as in Shala, received these Muslim names at birth. Paolo Dodmassei, the Catholic Bishop of Sappa in Pulat, reported in 1854 that the Nikaj tribesmen used Muslim names when they went to market in Gjakova, Peja and Prizren. The reason for this, they stated, was that they had to pass through Muslim regions and thought it was more appropriate to use Muslim names even though everyone knew they were Christians. Nor did they otherwise make any attempt to conceal their faith, as did the crypto-Christians in the Diocese of Skopje.² As in Mërturi and Lura, it was not unknown in Nikaj for there to be Catholics and Muslims in one and the same family.

The Nikaj tribe were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of one *bajrak*.³ Edith Durham regarded them, however, as being of mixed origin.⁴

Nikaj forms a common ethnological unit with neighbouring Mërturi. Today, one thus often speaks of Nikaj-Mërturi, although they are not blood related.

With regard to population statistics, in the period 1867–70 Nikaj consisted 240 households and 2,360 inhabitants.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population of the Nikaj tribe was as follows: 289 households with a total of 1,652 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Curraj i Epërm, Gjonpepaj, Nikprenaj and Peraj.⁵

During his visit to the region in August 1903, the Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz stated that Nikaj consisted of 2,445 souls inhabiting 24 villages, of which the main ones were Mëser, Peraj (also known as Palkolaj), Curraj i Poshtër (Curraj i Poshtëm), Nikbibaj, Kapit, Prebibaj, Threvalaj, Çokaj, Gjonpepaj, Slakaj and Nergjush.

In 1990, there were 911 households and 3,167 inhabitants in Nikaj, primarily in the settlements of Lekbibaj (pop. 849), Gjonpepaj (pop. 638), Peraj (pop. 630), Curraj i Epërm (pop. 623), Curraj i Poshtëm (pop. 245),

and Qereç and Kuq (pop. 137). Since that time, the population has declined substantially, as throughout the northern mountains in general, due to migration to the coast.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The legendary ancestral father of the Nikaj tribe was a herdsman from Krasniqja called Nikë Mekshi, who left the Krasniqja region around 1550–1600 when it was still Christian, and settled in the area of Papekaj i Epërm.⁶ This area was said to be the oldest part of Nikaj and had the ruins of an old church and graveyard. Nikë Mekshi was the brother of Kolë Mekshi who is considered to have been the ancestral father of the Kolmekshaj branch of the Krasniqja tribe. For this reason, Nikaj does not traditionally intermarry with Krasniqja, in particular with the Kolmekshaj. They consider the Krasniqja to be their brothers, i.e. the same *fis*, even though they traditionally had stronger relations with the neighbouring Mërturi tribe who are geographically closer.

Nikë Mekshi's son, Bibë Nikaj (or Biba i Nikës), had three sons of his own: Lekë Bibaj, Kolë Bibaj and Mar or Mark Bibaj, the latter of whom was also called Curr. Lekë Bibaj, in turn, had a son called Pap Lekaj, who was founder of the settlement of Papekaj, and Lekë's grandson, Nikë Preni, founded Nikprenaj (Nikprendaj). The inhabitants of Curraj are said to descend from Mark Bibaj and his two sons, Nikë Bibaj and Pre Bibaj.⁷

In oral tradition, the Nikaj tribe is said to have replaced an earlier population called the Mavriqi. They were said to stem from Vajush near Shkodra⁸ and settled in the mountains of Nikaj in the period 1416–1500. With the spread of the Nikaj, most of the earlier inhabitants emigrated to the Gucia region, although some of them remained and were assimilated. This earlier population is associated, in particular, with the settlement of Kapit.

Some families in Nikaj may also have been of Kelmendi or Bosnian origin.⁹ Baron Nopcsa noted: 'In contrast to many other tribes of northern Albania, the Nikaj stress that they are not from Dukagjin. Rightly or wrongly, the Nikaj regard themselves, like the Krasniqja and Vasojević, as being blood-related to the Hoti.'¹⁰

The Nikaj were the hereditary enemies of the equally Catholic Shala tribe, and were considered, together with the Dushmani, to be among the wildest inhabitants of the northern mountains. The water divide in

the mountains between Nikaj and Shala at Kryqi i Bajraktarit was the site of much fighting between Nikaj and Shala over the decades, and probably over centuries. In times of need, the Nikaj were assisted by the Krasniqja, and the Shala were assisted by their allies from the Shoshi tribe. In return, Nikaj came to the assistance of the Krasniqja tribe whenever it was in conflict with Gashi. Typical of the fighting between Nikaj and Shala is the following piece of oral history recorded by a Nikaj tribesman in 1956:

A Mërturi man killed two fellows from Shala at Lugi i Ndërmajnës which was on Nikaj territory. Shala sent word to Nikaj: 'We want our men back!' The elders of Nikaj gathered and after much investigation and talk, discovered that the two Shala fellows had indeed been killed by a Mërturi man. Two different opinions reigned at the tribal assembly. Some said: 'We are not responsible because we have concluded a shepherds' *besa* with Shala. We do not kill them and they do not kill us.' Others said: 'The men of Shala were killed on our land so they were our "guests" and we are responsible. The murderer should have killed them elsewhere, not on our land.' The second opinion won out and Nikaj was dishonoured. Nikaj then sent word to Nikë Myftari, the *bajraktar* of Mërturi: 'Hand over the murderer because he has dishonoured us.' Mërturi sent word back, saying: 'We simply took the blood that the Shala owed us.' Nikaj let out a wacry to attack Mërturi. Mërturi responded with a wacry to fight Nikaj. The Mërturi fighters assembled on the banks of the Drin at the Mërturi Bridge and lay in ambush for the Nikaj, but the Nikaj men overcame the ambush, burned down four or five *kullas* in Mërturi and killed four or five of their men, though they lost several fighters of their own on the battlefield. The elders of the tribes intervened and decided that an equal amount of blood had been spilled on both sides. Nikaj had thus taken revenge for the 'guest' from Shala who had been treacherously slain.¹¹

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Nikaj tribe had a *voyvoda*, three tribal elders and a *bajraktar*. The leading figure of the tribe by this time was the *voyvoda*, who resided in Lekbibaj, whereas the *bajraktar* was simply a military chief in time of war. The last *bajraktars* of Nikaj were:

Bash Bajrami (d. 1906), Sokol Basha (d. 1925), Deli Sokoli (d. 1936) and Sokol Delia (d. 1945). Nikaj had originally formed a common *bajrak* with Krasniqja for defence purposes. At the battle of Cernica, however, Nikaj won a banner from its enemy and declared itself to be a *bajrak* of its own right. The banner of Nikaj was white with a black hand in the middle of it. It was with this banner that the last *bajraktar* Sokol Delia was laid to rest.

Travel Impressions

Karl Steinmetz, who travelled on foot through Nikaj in 1904, reported on the region as follows:

The Nikaj are the hereditary enemies of the Shala. Where Nikaj and Shala meet, rifles always ring out. In some cases, however, the member of one tribe can travel in the other tribal region on condition that he be accompanied by a member of the tribe he is visiting. [...] The Nikaj and the Mërturi are notorious horse and cattle thieves. Hardly a day goes by that a horse stolen in the region is not taken from Nikaj down to Shkodra. When I was out seeing the sites with the missionary of Gjonpepaj the next day, I saw three such horses in a pasture that were waiting to be transported. The pastor told me that his mule had been stolen by a few Mërturi a week earlier.¹²

Steinmetz recorded great poverty in Nikaj as well as much unbridled violence, but also hospitality:

The Nikaj engage in herding and farming, but the results are not enough to survive on because the tribal territory is karstic and infertile by nature. Water must be brought in from afar to irrigate the fields on the small terraces along the slopes (there is no room for farming or herding at the bottom of the valley). Despite all their efforts, the harvests can fail and this often means starvation. Everywhere you go in Nikaj, you come across emaciated figures. I saw many men who did not even have a shirt to wear. However, none of them lacked rifles and cartridge belts. The latter are essential as can be understood from the following. I took advantage of the opportunity of my stay here to find out whether

a substantial percentage of the men do actually die violent deaths or whether such stories were exaggerated. It so happened that the missionary in Gjonpepaj kept a record of all deaths in Nikaj. According to this register, 13 men died in 1902, of whom only three died of natural causes. Ten were shot. The number is not this high every year, but it can nonetheless be stated that at least half of all men die a violent death. It must be stressed, however, that this is only true for the four warrior tribes of the mountains: Nikaj, Mërturi, Shala and Shoshi. The other tribes of northern Albania have much lower percentages.¹³

After sunset or whenever a Nikaj and a Shala come across one another, rifles are in unbridled action. Shots ring out in ecstasy whenever they hear that a member of the opposite tribe has been expedited to kingdom come. It is gruesome. One is reminded of the blood-curdling tales of the redskins when one hears of the Shala and Nikaj stealing over the mountain pass at nightfall to ambush and slay their rivals. They often spend several days in enemy territory with only a bit of bread and cheese with them to eat. In the daytime they hide up in the cliffs or in the bushes until they get their opportunity to shoot. On the second day of my stay there, I met a Nikaj tribesman in Gjonpepaj who, as the missionary revealed to me, had already shot twenty Shala. The Shala tribe, as they later told me, would do anything to get their hands on him¹⁴

The uncle of one of my Nikaj guides had been shot two weeks before my arrival and, as the closest relative, my guide was obliged to take revenge. He came across the murderer, another Nikaj tribesman, a week later and shot at him, but only managed to wound him slightly. One can imagine my amazement when I found out that, at the place where we had stopped to rest that day before crossing the Valbona River, not far from Bunjaj [Bujan], we had encountered the man my guide was pursuing and had exchanged a few innocent words with him. When I asked him why he did not shoot the fellow, he replied that he refrained from doing so out of respect for me as his guest. He would have done the same if the two had met at the house of a third party. They would have smoked cigarettes and drunk coffee together, even talked to one another quite normally. But if they met again a quarter of an hour later, their rifles would have been in use. From this, one can see how the

Albanians honour and respect their guests. The right of hospitality has absolute priority even over a blood feud!¹⁵

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Nikaj, which she visited in the spring of 1908:

‘Nikaj,’ said a priest bitterly, ‘is a land abandoned by God and man.’

The tribe is of mixed origin, and consists of some three hundred houses, so widely scattered over a wild country that the one Franciscan in charge struggles vainly with a hopeless task.

Twenty of these houses trace origin from Kilmeni, and are intermarriageable with the others, which are an offshoot of Krasnich. [...]

Practically it is without any form of government. The wild population does not even obey its own council of Elders. Wretched, abjectly poor, clad often in rags that are barely enough for decency, lean, dark men prowl the wild valleys, knowing no rule but that of their own most primitive instincts. And in that forlorn land it was fated that I should stay. [...]

The tribesmen received me extremely well. Few things please them more than almost endless pow-wows and arguments. The only thing that they objected to about me was my straw hat. They had never seen one before, and frankly said it was foolish, useless, and ugly. When I discarded it, and tied my head up in a towel and a pocket-handkerchief, in imitation of a tribesman, and then squatted cross-legged on the ground among them, they were quite childishly delighted, and ready to pour out the tales of blood and horror that are part of the dull routine of their lives.¹⁶

Baron Nopcsa very much enjoyed his stay in Nikaj in 1908:

A subsequent stay in Curraj i Epërm for several days was the best part of my Albanian travels in this period. In Curraj there was an uninhabited building. It was actually a church and was being used during my travels as a corn loft. It also had several unfurnished rooms devoid of whitewash. I spent my nights in this building with Mehmet Zeneli. We made ourselves a bed of insect-free hay.

The Curraj people soon learned of my arrival. They also knew that there was nothing to eat in the church building, so every evening a family invited us over to dinner. I delighted in their invitations and returned home late at night, torch in hand, to my modest quarters. Every morning, various men of Curraj would come and visit. Each of them brought food with them: fish, meat, salt, onions, sauerkraut, apples, schnapps, etc. Mehmet used all of the provisions to make us lunch. A cloth was spread out as a table for me and my guests, and we had great meals. In 1908, as far as I could see, the Curraj and the Mërturi were the tribes that were the least touched by outside influence. The worst of them were the money-grubbing Thethi people.¹⁷

Others travellers described Nikaj in much less favourable terms. 'The inhabitants of Nikaj are regarded as the most pugnacious of all the highlanders.'¹⁸ 'The district is sterile and often waterless. Nikaj is the wildest and most inaccessible of Albanian clans, gloomy, taciturn, and easily offended.'¹⁹

Figures of Note

Ndoc Nikaj

Prose writer and publisher, Dom Ndoc Nikaj (1864–1951), has been called the father of the Albanian novel. Scion of the Nikaj tribe, he was born in Shkodra, studied at the Jesuit Kolegjia Papnore Shqyptare (Albanian Pontifical Seminary) there, was ordained in 1888, and subsequently worked as a parish priest in the Shkreli mountains. As a publisher, he began his career by founding the weekly newspaper *Koha* (*The Time*) in January 1910. In the spring of 1913, he founded another newspaper, the *Besa Shqyptare* (*The Albanian Pledge*), which was published two to four times a week until 1921. In addition to running newspapers, Ndoc Nikaj also had his own small publishing company, the Shtypshkroja Nikaj (Nikaj Press), founded in 1909, at which many of his own works and those of others were published. Although the publishing company was not a financial success, businessman Nikaj was able to compensate for the loss with profits earned in other more lucrative fields, such as lumber and gunrunning. After World War I, Nikaj turned increasingly to writing and published both educative works for schools,

religious works for the church and some literary prose. Little is known of his personal life in later years. In the realm of creative literature, Nikaj is the author of numerous volumes of prose in the main, though also of some plays. During the persecution of the Catholic clergy in northern Albania in 1946, Dom Ndoc Nikaj was arrested by the communists, at the age of 82, on the absurd charge of 'planning the violent overthrow of the government', and died in Shkodra prison in 1951.

The Mërturi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Mërturi tribal region is situated on the right (north) and left (south) sides of the Drin River in the Districts of Puka and Tropoja in northern Albania, basically the area to the west of the settlement of Fierza. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Shoshi to the west, Nikaj to the north, Krasniqja and Thaçi to the east, Berisha to the south, and Toplana to the southwest. On the northern side of the Drin, the Mërturi traditionally inhabit land both to the right and to the left of the Curraj/Nikaj River that flows into the Drin. The main settlements of Mërturi are: Raja (now Bregluma), Tetaj, Apripa (Apripa e Gurit), Mërtur (Mërturi i Gurit), Brisa and Palç.

Population

The term Mërturi was recorded as *Marturi* in 1629 in an ecclesiastical report by Giezzi Bianco.

The Mërturi tribe were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of one *bajrak*. They now form a common ethnological unit with neighbouring Nikaj. Today, one thus often speaks of Nikaj-Mërturi.

The Mërturi were almost entirely Catholic. The patron saint of the tribe was the Virgin Mary, *Zoja e Mërturit* (Our Lady of Mërturi), whose feast day, 7–8 September, commemorates her nativity. The first Franciscans visited the Mërturi region in 1636 and settled there in 1755. In 1835 they built the parish church of Mërturi which was constructed in Raja on a cliff on the right bank of the Drin River.²⁰ It was, however, dedicated to Saint Veneranda. There were about 100–200 Muslims

among them in the early twentieth century. As in Lura and Nikaj, it was not unknown in Mërturi for there to be Catholics and Muslims in one and the same family.

There were also Mërturi in and around Gjakova. Edith Durham noted in the first decade of the twentieth century that 'Djakova was founded about four hundred years ago by two stocks from Bitush Merturi – Vula and Merturi. Of these two the Vula stock still flourishes.'²¹

Johann Georg von Hahn who travelled up the Drin Valley in 1863 described the Mërturi as being much larger than the Thaçi tribe and as living on both sides of the Drin. Their main settlements were: Saint Sebastian, Salca, Palç, Kotez and Raja (Saint Veneranda).²²

The Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz, who hiked through the region in August 1903, noted the following:

Tetaj is the largest settlement of Mërturi, that has a total population of some 2,000 souls, not including the members of the tribe who live south of the Drin River around Çelumi i Mërturit. The two next largest settlements are Bëtosha and Raja. The *bajraktar*, Beg Delia, lives in Shëngjergj. All of the houses here, as in Nikaj, take the form of *kullas*.²³

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Mërturi tribe were given as follows: 354 households with a total of 2,211 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Apripa e Gurit, Bëtosha, Brisa, Curraj i Poshtëm, Mërturi i Gurit, Palç, Raja, Salca, Shëngjergj and Tetaj.²⁴

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The legendary ancestral father of the Mërturi tribe was called Lek Poga, son of Pog Murri and grandson of Murr Deti, also known as Murr Dedi. His brother, Kol Poga, was the ancestral father of the closely related Berisha tribe.

This Lek Poga, also known as Leka Pogu, had five sons who settled in the various parts of Mërturi: Bib Leka in Shëngjergj, Raja and Mulaj; Ndre Leka in Palç, Apripa and Mërturi i Gurit; Mar Leka in Salca and Brisa; Tet Leka in Markaj, Tetaj and Bëtosha; and Pec Leka in Bëtosha.²⁵

The Berisha and Mërturi were initially one tribe and separated in 1520, with the Mërturi tribe moving northwards into their present territory. While leaving Berisha land, the Mërturi first arrived in a stony and very poor region called Straziç where they managed gradually to drive the original Toplana population off the slightly more fertile parts of the land. They are said to have created a settlement here around the year 1556. In 1590, they settled in Brisa and in some areas south of the Drin River. In 1650, the Mërturi divided into two halves that later settled on the northwestern and southern slopes of Mount Korja (Korja e Mërturit).²⁶ By the early years of the twentieth century it was, as Baron Nopcsa notes, separated into three parts:

The Mërturi tribe is a classic example of how geographical barriers influence tribal divisions. The Mërturi inhabit a region that is divided by the Drin River and by the tribal land of the Nikaj into three geographical parts: northeastern Mërturi or actual Mërturi north of the Drin on the slopes of Mount Korja (Korja e Mërturit); southern Mërturi, also called Mërturi i Gurit, south of the Drin on the slopes of Mount Shllum (Shllumi i Mërturit); and northwestern Mërturi (Salca) on the slopes of Mount Ershell (Maja e Ershellit). All three parts are beginning to grow independent of one another. The two parts north of the Drin still regulate many of their affairs in common, but the southern part does not even attend the tribal gatherings. Of particular interest are the relations of Salca and Mërturi i Gurit to Toplana. No doubt as a result of the earlier expulsion of the Toplana from Straziç, the Mërturi and Toplana are hereditary foes, and firearms are often in action when the two tribes meet. Sometimes they conclude a *besa*. What is curious is that Toplana will conclude a *besa* with Salca but it is not valid for Mërturi i Gurit which is nominally the same tribe. Mërturi i Gurit is thus forced to conclude its own ceasefires with Toplana. It was only after a few days in Salca that I learned that it was even related to Mërturi i Gurit. As to the Mërturi village of Apripa, that is separated from Mërturi i Gurit by Mount Shllum and from the rest of Mërturi by the Drin River, it has now quite openly joined Thaçi, although it did so only for lack of alternatives.²⁷

Both Nikaj and Mërturi, though Catholic tribes, did their trading in Muslim Gjakova rather than in Catholic Shkodra. Karl Steinmetz reported as follows in August 1903 on their struggle to get to market:

The market for the whole of the Malësia e Gjakovës including Nikaj and Mërturi is Gjakova. It is here that the mountain tribes bring their products and it is here that they buy their goods. However, since it is dangerous for Nikaj and Mërturi, who are often involved in bloody skirmishes with Krasniqja, to pass through the latter's territory, those who want to go into town [Gjakova] gather every Friday early in the morning and they all set off together. They return on Mondays, again all of them together. As it happened to be a Monday on which we crossed through Krasniqja [...], we came across the Nikaj and Mërturi returning from Gjakova. The women and girls, who are used as beasts of burden throughout the mountains, as they are in Montenegro, were all loaded down, mostly with sacks of flour and salt. Some of the men here preferred to carry only their weapons. These poor people have to carry weights of 35 to 40 kilos for a day and a half, and climb not only over Kolsh Pass (Qafa e Koshit) but over two other passes, which are, admittedly, much lower. They spend the night out in the open. From time to time, we also saw mules which are used in the mountains rather than horses because they are sure-footed. However, because of the trackless territory in Nikaj, Mërturi, Shala and Shoshi, there are few mules, and none at all in Toplana and Dushmani.²⁸

The Krasniqja Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Krasniqja (also called Krasniqi) tribal region is situated in the District of Tropoja in northeastern Albania, north of the Drin River, from Fierza eastwards to the District of Has, and northwards to the Montenegrin border, including most of the upper Valbona valley. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Nikaj and Mërturi to the west, Thaçi and Bugjoni to the south, Bytyçi to the east, and Gashi to the northeast. The main settlements of Krasniqja are: Bajram Curri (Kolgecaj) which is the capital and administrative centre, Selimaj (Gegëhysen), Bujan, Llugaj, Margegaj and Dragobia.

Population

The term Krasniqja was recorded as *Crastenigeia* in 1634 in the ecclesiastical report of the Franciscan priest Bonaventura di Palazzolo (d. 1657), as *Krastenigje* in 1636 in a report of the Albanian bishop of Sappa and Sarda, Frang Bardhi (Francesco Bianchi); and as *Grastenichia* in 1688 on the map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli. The word is of Slavic origin, possibly related to BCS *brasto* 'oak'. Krasniqi is a common family name, in particular in Kosovo.

The Krasniqja were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted initially of one and later of two *bajraks*.

The Krasniqja tribe was primarily Muslim, and had close relations with the Gashi and Bytyçi tribes. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Edith Durham described them as 'Albanophone and fanatically Moslem'.²⁹ Before the coming of the Turks, they were Catholic, at least nominally. They were strictly exogamous until about 1945, i.e. there were no marriages within the tribe until that time. Now the custom is no longer observed.

As to population statistics, in his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains' in 1841, Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gives the population of Krasniqja as 4,000, of whom 1,000 were men in arms.³⁰

Johann Georg von Hahn, who travelled up the Drin Valley in 1863, reported that Krasniqja consisted of 400 households divided into four groups, but acted as one *bajrak*.³¹ They extended down to the right bank of the Drin River.³²

On his earlier trip through Kosovo in 1858, Hahn also discovered that the majority of the population of Prishtina was Krasniqja:

The Grashnich [Krasniqja] are to be found mainly in and around Prishtina and constitute virtually the entire Muslim population of that town. [...] Upper and Lower Gollak are the main villages of the Krasniqja in the region of Prishtina, where they are more or less equal in number to the Kelmendi. They are also prominent in Leskovac and Mitrovica, and are equally to be found in the region of Vranje.³³

There are still many people in Kosovo who identify themselves as Krasniqja or Krasniqi, in particular in the villages of Dumnica,

Drenica, Gjilan and Prishtina as well as in Bujanovc (Bujanovac) in southern Serbia.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Krasniqja-tribe were given as follows: 864 households with a total of 4,803 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Bratoshnica, Bujan, Çerem, Dega, Dragobia, Gria, Koçanaj, Kolgecaj (Bajram Curri), Lekurtaj (Gegëhysen), Margegaj, Pjani i epër, Pjani i poshtër, Selimaj i Madh, Selimaj i Vogël and Shoshan.³⁴

Krasniqja consisted traditionally of two *bajraks*: Dragobia in the Valbona valley, and Bujan situated between Bajram Curri and Fierza. The last *bajraktar* of Dragobia was Kadri Smajli (d. 1945), and the last *bajraktar* of Bujan was Sali Mani (d. 1947), whose *kulla*, which served as the site of the conference of Bujan in early January 1944, is now preserved as a museum.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The ancestors of the Krasniqja are said to have stemmed from Bosnia and migrated through Montenegro to the area of Reç, north of Shkodra. Then, sometime after 1600, they moved inland to the area of Dushaj i Epër, east of Fierza, in what is broadly their present region. Here they took over land that had been settled by the Gashi and gradually drove the latter tribe eastwards. In the process of establishing themselves as a tribal unit, they also drove the Thaçi westwards across the Drin River.³⁵

The ancestral father of the Krasniqja was Kolë Mekshi from whom the Kolmekshaj branch of Krasniqja was formed. The Kolmekshaj are now native to the villages of Shoshan, Kocanaj, Dragobia, Bradoshnica, Dega, Murataj and half of the village of Margegaj. They can trace their genealogy back 15 or 16 generations, to about the year 1600. It is said that Kolë Mekshi had a brother called Nikë Mekshi who is regarded as the ancestral father of the Nikaj tribe. The Nikaj and the Krasniqja, in particular the Kolmekshaj, did not therefore intermarry.

The Krasniqja are also said to be closely related to the Slavic-speaking Vasojević tribe in Montenegro. They were a relatively prosperous tribe, who in addition to their own land in the upper Valbona valley and on the eastern slopes of the Krasniqja mountains, possessed pastureland on the southern slopes of the Curraj valley towards Nikaj territory.

The main market for the Krasniqja tribe was Gjakova, which they reached over the 568 m. Morina Pass (Qafa e Morinë) or through Bytyçi over the 651 m. Prush Pass (Qafa e Prushit).

The Krasniqja were known among the mountain tribes for their watchfulness, as reflected in the popular saying: 'The wisdom of the Gashi, the watchfulness of the Krasniqja, the wrath of the Berisha, the heroism of the Kelmendi, the slyness of the Shala, a snake in the grass like the Thaçi' (*Mênja e Gasbit, sÿni i Krasniqes, inati i Berishës, trimnia e Kelmënit, dredhia e Shaljanit, gjarpnia e Thaçit*).

Travel Impressions

The Bosnian Croatian priest, Lovro Mihačević, travelled through Krasniqja in 1907:

On 17 June we set off early in the morning along the banks of the Valbona River for Nikaj and had to cross through the Muslim village of Krasniqi. It is a fine and wondrous place, and well in accord with its name 'Krasniqi' that can be translated as 'beautiful village.' All around us were lush groves and hedges, and well-cultivated fields with different crops of grain growing in them. The white *kullas* of the beys and aghas were scattered here and there like white swans as the green waters of the Valbona foamed and made their way through the middle of the plain until they flowed into the Drin. Above Krasniqi was the village of Gegëhysen, where an inn welcomed weary travellers. On the way to the inn, we came across an old graveyard under ancient oak trees. Across from it were the remains of a monastery near which there was once a church, the foundations of which were still visible. The church was roofless and exposed to the elements. The entrances to both the church and the monastery were blocked up with rocks so that no one could enter. Until about eighty years ago, holy mass was held in this church, when the people of Krasniqi were still Catholic, but when they converted to Islam, the church was barricaded and the dead were no longer buried in the graveyard around it. Nonetheless, the people still call it 'our church' and 'our graveyard'.

We dismounted in front of the inn to rest for a while. While we were having coffee, we were approached by a myriad of men and women. They were exceptionally fair-skinned people who were

gentle, polite and affable to visitors. They were all Muslims. The women surrounded me and asked me for medicinal herbs. I had no choice but to get up and take them over to a near-by garden where I showed them *matricaria chamomilla* [camomile], *equisetum arvense* [common horsetail], *cichorium* [chicory], *menta piperita* [peppermint], *althaea officinalis* [marshmallow], *sambucus nigra* [elderberry], *verbascum* [mullein], *symphytum officinale* [wild comfrey], *achillea millefolium* [yarrow], and *tussilago farfara* [coltsfoot], etc. and explained to them how they could use them and how to prepare them. Then we got back on our horses and proceeded along a dreadful trail for two hours to reach the summit of Kolsh Pass from where we had a wonderful view of the surrounding nature, of the villages of Gashi, Krasniqi, Curraj and of the valley of the Black Drin.³⁶

Figures of Note

Haxhi Zeka

The Kosovo Albanian nationalist figure and guerrilla fighter, Haxhi Mulla Zeka (1832–1902), also known as Zek Mehmet Byberi and in Turkish sources as Zejnül Abedin, was born in Shoshan, now in the District of Tropoja. He was among the organisers of the League of Prizren, at which he represented Peja, and was chosen as a member of its central council on 10 June 1878. As a landowner and military commander, Zeka took part in fighting in Gjakova against Mehmet Ali Pasha in September 1878. He is also said to have been behind the murder of Ali Pasha of Gucia in the Rugova canyon. In 1890–2 an armed rebellion took place against Turkish rule after years of widespread discontent about taxes and conscription into the Ottoman army. In late May 1893, Haxhi Zeka organised forces in Peja and the surrounding region, which were joined by men from Gjakova and elsewhere in Kosovo. When Turkish troops were sent in to quell the uprising and many villages were burnt down, Haxhi Zeka negotiated with the authorities. He declared he would submit only to the authority of the sultan and set off with five other men (two Muslims, one Catholic and two Orthodox Serbs) for Constantinople. He arrived there in December 1893 and was received cordially by Sultan Abdulhamid II. He remained in Constantinople for two years of ‘voluntary’ exile, and on his return to Kosovo, on 15 October 1895, he was accorded a triumphant welcome by

the population on his way from Skopje to Peja. From 1896 to 1900, Haxhi Zeka was once again at the head of the Albanian struggle for autonomy and national self-determination, and led another armed uprising in Kosovo in 1897. In an effort to revive the spirit of the League of Prizren, he founded the *Besëlidhja shqiptare* (Albanian League) in the same year. In Peja, on 26–30 January 1899, Haxhi Zeka organised a meeting of 450 leaders, most of them from Kosovo, that gave rise to the Albanian League of Peja, which he also headed. He was extremely popular with the rural and mountain population at the turn of the century and it was rumoured that he was to be appointed governor of a new Albanian vilayet. Soon there after, however, in February 1902, Haxhi Zeka was murdered in the bazaar of Peja by one Adem Zaimi of Gjakova in what was said to be a tribal dispute. His death brought the Albanian uprising in Kosovo, Dibra and parts of northern Albania to an end. Haxhi Zeka's well-marked grave is situated in the courtyard of the Bajrakli Mosque in the centre of Peja.

Mic Sokoli

The nationalist figure and guerrilla fighter, Mic Sokoli (1839–81), was born in the village of Fang near Bujan in Krasniqja. He was a noted guerrilla leader during the years of the League of Prizren and took part in the fighting in Gjakova against Mehmet Ali Pasha. Mic Sokoli is remembered in particular for an act which has entered the annals of Albanian legendry as a deed of exemplary heroism. At the battle of Slivova against Ottoman forces in April 1881, he thrust himself against a Turkish cannon, his chest pressed against its mouth, and perished when it was fired.

Bajram bey Curri

The noted political figure and guerrilla fighter, Bajram bey Curri (1862–1925), had a strong connection with Krasniqja. He was one of the best-known guerrilla commanders of Kosovo and made a name for himself in the struggle against Ottoman and later Serbian rule. Bajram Curri was among the founders of the Albanian League of Peja in 1899–1900 and took part in several local armed rebellions against Ottoman rule, but also served as an officer in the Turkish army for several years. Like most educated Albanians, he initially supported the Young Turk movement, but distanced himself from it when it ignored Albanian calls for autonomy. He subsequently became a proponent of more active

resistance to Turkish rule and took part in the Kosovo uprising of 1913. In particular, together with Hasan bey Prishtina (1873–1933) and Isa bey Boletini (1864–1916), he organised resistance to the 1913 Treaty of London, which recognised Serbian claims to his native Kosovo. During World War I, he supported the Central Powers, believing that they would be more likely to liberate Kosovo from Serbian rule. In 1918, he was forced to flee to Vienna with Hasan bey Prishtina. Back in Albania in 1920, Bajram Curri was appointed minister without portfolio in the Albanian government created by the Congress of Lushnja and assisted in suppressing the forces of Essad Pasha Toptani (1863–1920). He also led the Committee for the National Defence of Kosovo (*Komiteti Mbrojtja Kombëtare e Kosovës*) in the autumn of 1920 to promote an armed struggle against Serbian forces in Kosovo. Fearful of international criticism, the Albanian government, however, impeded any concrete action by Curri's committee. After the coup d'état in Albania in December 1921 and the uprising that he himself initiated in March 1922 to counter the Albanian government of Ahmet Zogu (1895–1961) that was increasingly falling under Yugoslav influence, he was relieved of all his posts. In January 1923, he and Hasan bey Prishtina organised an uprising against Zogu, but the movement was suppressed jointly by the Albanian and Yugoslav governments. In June 1924, he supported the so-called Democratic Revolution of Fan Noli (1882–1965) and the latter's short-lived government, and led the rebel movement in Kosovo and Dibra. He accompanied Noli to Geneva to represent Albania's interests at the League of Nations. A price was put on Bajram Curri's head when Ahmet Zogu took power, and he fled to Krasniqja territory. On 29 March 1925, he was surrounded by Zogist troops while hiding in a cave at Gryka e Matinës near Dragobia in the Valbona valley. After a shoot-out, he is said to have killed himself in order to avoid capture. The main settlement of Krasniqja tribal territory, Kolgecaj, was later renamed Bajram Curri after him. It is now the capital of the District of Tropoja.

The Gashi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Gashi tribal region is situated in the District of Tropoja in northeastern Albania, from east of the town of Bajram Curri (Kolgecaj)

into the Municipality of Gjakova in Kosovo. Much of Gashi corresponds to the valley of the Llugaj and Bushtrica rivers. Gashi borders on the traditional tribal regions of Krasniqja to the west, and Bytyçi over the 815 m. Luzha Pass (Qafa e Luzhës) to the south. The Gashi tribe also possessed summer pastureland north of the mountain to the east of Vuthaj/Vusanje (now in Montenegro). The main settlements of Gashi are: Tropoja, Ahmataj (Shushicë-Ahmataj), Mejdan and Luzha.

Population

The term Gashi was recorded as *Gaasi* in 1634 in the ecclesiastical report of the Franciscan priest Bonaventura di Palazzolo (d. 1657), as *Gassi* in 1650 in the report of Fra Giacinto, and as *Gassi* and *Gasi* in 1671 in the report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari.

The Gashi were a Muslim tribe and were the traditional enemies of the Catholic Shala.

They were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of two *bajraks*: Gashi centred on Koçanaj, and Shipshan centred on Kasaj. The Gashi regarded themselves as related to Krasniqja, both having come from the west.

As to population statistics, in his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains' in 1841, Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gives the population of Gashi as 4,000, of whom 1,000 were men in arms.³⁷

Johann Georg von Hahn, who travelled through the region in the summer of 1863, noted that Gashi consisted of 500 households divided into two *bajraks*, the Shipshaj and the Bardhaj.³⁸ In 1858, he had also noticed the presence of the Gashi in the region of Leskovac in southern Serbia:

Mixed in with the Krasniqja in the region of Leskovac are branches of the Sopi (hay), Berisha and Gashi tribes. [...] Gashi can also be found in the region of Masurica, most of which, however, belongs to the Krasniqja. The Gashi inhabit six villages in the district of Leskovac, but have no relations with the rest of their tribe in Prishtina and Vranje. Their one-time chief was Latif Aga, famed throughout the land for this bravery. He has now been replaced by his eldest son Reshid Aga,

whose brother Emin commands the five-man garrison at the guardhouse in Lebana [Lebane].³⁹

Gashi was estimated in 1908 to have a population of 4,000, with 800 households and 800 armed men.⁴⁰

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Gashi tribe were given as follows: 591 households with a total of 3,628 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Babina, Begaj, Berbat (Shkëlzen), Buçin, Gegaj, Kernaja, Kovaç, Mehjan, Papaj and Tropoja.⁴¹

Gashi is a common family name, in particular in Kosovo, where there are Gashi settlements in and around Prishtina (in particular in Mramor), around Gjiilan, Klina and Ferizaj.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Baron Nopcsa, who investigated the origins of the Gashi tribe in about 1907, reported that they were originally related to the Toplana:

The ancestral father of Toplana, whose name I do not know, was the younger brother of Can Gabeti, the ancestral father of the Shllaku. Can Gabeti lived 14 or 15 generations ago. He had another brother called Gjergj Gabeti who was the ancestral father of the Mëgulla tribe. A fourth brother, whose name is not known, was the ancestral father of the Gashi tribe. [...] The four brothers originally lived in the Shllaku region where they divided up their possessions. After the division, the ancestors of the Gashi and Toplana moved eastwards. The Gashi settled in the region of Serma between the Nikaj and Leshnica rivers. [...] The Gashi settlement in Serma was of short duration because its move from that region to its present-day territory took place around 1660. As Monsignor Mjeda told me on the basis of an old manuscript that is now lost, this happened because some of the remaining Catholics of Gashi murdered two hodjas. The tribe was then surrounded by the troops of Begolli Bey of Peja and forced to give up their Catholic religion and to take up residence in the new region where a native population called Anas lived. Another legend in Toplana has the Gashi emigrating from the Toplana

region around the year 1600. [...] The genealogy of the Toplana comprises 13 generations. The original emigration of the Gashi and Toplana from Shllaku must therefore have taken place around 1524 or perhaps somewhat earlier, probably as a result of the first Turkish war in Albania.⁴²

At any rate, the Gashi are thought to have been the first tribe in the region of Tropoja, i.e. before the Krasniqja. Historical reference is made to another ancestral father of the Gashi called Leka, the son of Petri Spani, who lived in the settlement of Selimaj (Gegëhysen) in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁴³ Frang Bardhi, the Bishop of Sappa and Sarda, noted their presence in a report in 1636:

After crossing the Drin River, we visited a village called Krastenigje [Krasniqja]. From this village, we crossed the Valbona River and visited another village called Gash where we were well received. This village is quite large – 97 households with 866 Christian souls. The centre of this village is Selimaj. The head of the Gashi tribe is called Pjetër Spani, formerly Lord of Pulat.⁴⁴

Another component of the Gashi tribe were the Bardhët (*i bardhë* means 'white') who, in the seventeenth century, stemmed from the Kuçi tribe in Montenegro, which was originally Albanian and is now Slavic-speaking. Their descendants are Muslim and can trace their origins back 13 or 14 generations. They settled in the village of Gosturan in the upper reaches of the Tropoja River sometime between 1600 and 1650.⁴⁵

The Shipshan *bajrak* of the Gashi tribe is said, according to legend, to have been founded in the seventeenth century by a gypsy man who married the daughter of the tribal leader of Gashi and moved with her to Shipshan. The toponym was first recorded in the Ottoman register of 1485 as a village of 42 households.

The main market for the Gashi tribe was Gjakova that they reached over the Morina Pass (Qafa e Morinës) which was in their territory. They traditionally met with the neighbouring Krasniqja tribe at Vorret e Shalës (Shala Graves), which was situated on a ridge between the Valbona and Tropoja rivers.

The Gashi were known among the mountain tribes for their wisdom, as reflected in the popular saying: 'The wisdom of the Gashi, the watchfulness of the Krasniqja, the wrath of the Berisha, the heroism of the Kelmendi, the slyness of the Shala, a snake in the grass like the Thaçi' (*Mênja e Gashit, sÿni i Krasniqes, inati i Berishës, trimnia e Kelmënit, dredbia e Shaljanit, gjarpnia e Thaçit*).

The Bytyçi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The tribal region of the Bytyçi, also spelled Bityçi, Bitiçi and Bytyqi, is situated in the southeastern part of the District of Tropoja in northeastern Albania, north of the Drin River. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Gashi to the northwest over the 815 m. Luzha Pass (Qafa e Luzhës), Krasniqja to the west and Hasi to the south. East of Bytyçi, over the 651 m. Prush Pass (Qafa e Prushit), is Gjakova in Kosovo. The main settlements of Bytyçi, which consists of a plain surrounded by low hills, are: Kam, which is its administrative centre, Çorraj, Viliq (Çorr-Velaj), Kepenek, Leniq, Mash, Pac, Prush, Visoça, Vlad, Zogaj and Zherka. The traditional territory of Bytyçi also includes the high mountain pastures of Sylbica.

Population

The term Bytyç was first recorded in the register of the Sanjak of Dukagjin in 1571 as being a neighbourhood (*mahalla*) of Rodogosht and part of Rudina. It had 39 households at that time. The term is said to stem from Aromanian and means 'potter', since clay pots were produced here, although this etymology is uncertain.

The Bytyçi are a Muslim tribe. They were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor, and consisted of one *bajrak*. They were traditionally herders and farmers.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Bytyçi tribe were given as follows: 354 households with a total of 2,044 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Berisha, Kam, Kepenek, Luzha, Pac, Vlad, Zherka and Zogaj.⁴⁶ In 2004, Bytyçi had a population of 2,078, and in 2008 of 2,185 inhabitants.

Johann Georg von Hahn, who travelled through Kosovo in 1858, also noted the presence of two Bytyçi villages in the Llap valley around Podujeva in northwestern Kosovo.⁴⁷ There are still many Bytyçi families in and around Ferizaj, Gjakova and Suhareka.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The Bytyçi tribe derives its ancestry from a figure called Lekë Bytyçi, who stemmed from the lower Drin Valley around Koman. He and his people moved eastwards and settled in what is now Viliq. Lekë Bytyçi had three sons: Vili, Biba and Karli. Vili, the eldest son, moved on from Bytyçi land and settled in the region of Prizren. Biba settled in the eastern part of the Bytyçi valley, around Rasada and Pac. He had three sons: Martin, Gjon and Pac. Karli, the youngest son of Lekë Bytyçi, settled with this family in the western part of the Bytyçi valley, around Viliq. He had one son, Vili, and many daughters whom he married off to the Krasniqja and Hasi tribes.⁴⁸

Another, although similar version of their ancestry, has them stemming from the Shkreli tribe. They took the name Bytyçi from the new region in which they settled, some time after 1600.⁴⁹

In Ottoman times, the Bytyçi region was traditionally part of the *kaza* of Gjakova (Altun-ili). In the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century (up to 1864) it was under the sway of the Begolli pashas of Peja, and from 1864 to 1912 it formed part of the Vilayet of Kosovo. The Serbian invasion of the region in 1912 resulted in Bytyçi being cut off from its market towns of Gjakova and Peja and in the consequent destitution of the tribe. Bytyçi was on the Albanian side of the border, and its nearby markets were in Serbian-occupied Kosovo.

Bytyçi and the rest of the Gjakova Highlands (Malësia e Gjakovës) were invaded by Serbian forces in October 1913. In Bytyçi itself, 2,000 homes were burned to the ground and 51 men were killed. The Bytyçi region was attacked by Serbian forces again in June and August 1915. In the autumn of that year, the village of Qerret inhabited by the Ukshi family was wiped out almost entirely. Only one family member survived, who had not been in the village at the time of the attack.

Travel Impressions

The Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz, who hiked through the region in August 1903, left the following impressions:

On the other side of Luzha Pass, I glimpsed a beautiful little plateau surrounded by low mountains draped in bushes. It was covered from one end to the other in green meadows and fields, and there were houses scattered all around the slopes. Here and there were grazing flocks and a brook meandering through the beautiful scene. Before me lay the basin of Bytyçi, the richest region of the mountains. As mentioned earlier, the Bytyçi are a much weaker tribe than the Krasniqja and the Gashi, but they nonetheless enjoy a great reputation among the other two for their prosperity and their bravery.⁵⁰



The tribal regions of Puka and Mirdita

CHAPTER 5

THE TRIBES OF THE PUKA REGION

The Qerreti Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Qerreti (also Chereti) tribal region is situated in the District of Puka in northern central Albania. It is located on the left (southern) side of the Drin River in the area northwest of the town of Puka. Qerreti, which is considered one of the 'seven tribes of Puka' (*shtatë bajrakët e Pukës*), borders on the traditional tribal regions of Mazreku and Shllaku on the other side of the Drin River to the north, on Puka and Kabashi to the east, and on Spaçi in Mirdita to the south. The main settlements of Qerreti are: Qerreti i Madh ('Greater Qerret', also known as Qerreti i Epërm, 'Upper Qerret'), Qerreti i Vogël ('Lesser Qerret', formerly known as Qerreti i poshtër, 'Lower Qerret'), Kçira and Dush.

Population

The term Qerret occurs as *Cetereti* in a report of the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich, in 1703. It seems to be etymologically related to Alb. *qarr* 'Turkey oak tree' (*Quercus cerris*).

The *bajrak* of Qerreti was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

The Qerreti were primarily Catholic (85 per cent) with a minority of Muslims (15 per cent). They were closely related to the Kabashi and other Puka tribes.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Qerreti tribe were given as follows: 327 households with a total of 2,080 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Dush, Karma, Kçira, Koman, Qerret i Epërm (Qerret i Madh) and Qerret i Poshtëm (Qerret i Vogël).¹

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The Qerreti were a relatively old tribe in the region. According to tradition, they were related to the Bytyçi, who moved eastwards from their original homeland around Komani, and to the autonomous house of Pervozi in Qelëza. The Qerreti of Vilza, now in Drishti tribal land, stemmed, however, from the Dushmani.²

Travel Impressions

Johann Georg von Hahn, who travelled up the Drin Valley by boat in the summer of 1863, was impressed by the impetuous behaviour and the hospitality of the natives of the region:

At Don Angelo's request, when we left Malç, we took on board with us four men to serve as boat hands. He spoke to them, saying, 'Come with us and help us, otherwise it will all be in vain.' The men immediately clambered into the barques. None of them requested time to fetch his coat or other necessities, and none of them asked those staying behind to inform their wives. Nor did any of those staying behind ask to be taken with us. The ease and light-heartedness with which Albanians make decisions is one of their chief characteristics. They are men given to deeds, but no more than that. A consequence of their impetuous behaviour is that they change moods very quickly. I asked Don Angelo about this and he confirmed my perception of things entirely. He spoke in particular about the legendary touchiness of the Albanians and their violent tempers. He gave me several examples of young people who were good friends and who went out together, laughed and joked around, and then, all of a sudden, one of them would

draw his pistol and shoot the other. This swift change of mood is something that can be encountered in predatory animals. I do not regard it as a positive characteristic of the Albanians, but rather as a sign of their low level of civilization. This explains their erratic behaviour, something which has often been noticed about this people.

However, we were also offered ample proof here of a positive aspect of the Albanian character –their boundless hospitality. From Malç onwards, hardly an hour went by on the river that we were not called over to the bank to stop and were given gifts. These consisted mostly of grapes, figs and peaches, the latter being of excellent quality and without any doubt the best produce of this stony land. But we were also given apples and pears, though of lesser quality than the peaches, and indeed brandy and a sort of pancake that the Greeks call *tiganites*. In some places we were veritably heaped with fruit. I remember one day that the 21 of us on board (7 travellers, 6 sailors, 2 kavasses and 6 natives) had so much fruit that lay in heaps in boxes on the boat, that we could not manage to eat it all. None of the Albanians took any of it themselves, but only ate what I gave them or what I ordered to be given to them. When they took off their clothes to enter the water, they always excused themselves, saying there was no other way and I had hired them for the job, and when they got back into the boat naked, they covered themselves as best they could and turned their backs to us. There were no incivilities, and no inappropriate words or gestures.

When we got past the village of Karma, we came across six natives on the riverbank whom Don Angelo had asked, via a messenger, to come. They explained that we would have no problem with the gorge, but that at its upper end there was a difficult stretch because there was no bank. They suggested that we all get out and use the mountain path that would take us to the top of the gorge in one and a half hours. There we should wait until the barques arrived. I could see the gorge, but I did not want to leave all of our things unattended. In addition to this, the crew stated that they would not proceed without one of us being present with them. As such, I remained on board and the others

got out and took the said path. The tallest of our new native companions, pointing to my high boots, said to me: 'You are going to get wet even with your boots on.' I replied: 'Then I will ride piggy back on you.' The others laughed and I was happy to have established a good rapport with them, because I was the first Frank that these children of nature had ever seen, and they had no place for me on their social ladder (short as it may have been). The men all behaved properly. They answered my questions without delay and carried out all of my orders without any arguments.³

The Puka Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Puka tribal region is situated in the District of Puka in northern central Albania. It is located on the left (southern) side of the Drin River along the old road from Shkodra to Prizren. Puka, which is considered one of the 'seven tribes of Puka' (*shtatë bajrakët e Pukës*), borders on the traditional tribal regions of Qerreti to the west, Dushmani and Berisha to the north, Kabashi to the east, and Spaçi in Mirdita to the south. The main settlement of the Puka tribal region is the town of Puka, which is currently the administrative centre of the District of Puka.

Population

The term Puka first occurs as *Epicaria* recorded by the Greco-Roman writer Ptolomy in about 150 A.D. It occurs in Latin as *Ad Piccaria* about 100 years later in the Tabula Peutingeriana (Peutinger Table). A Turkish-language document records the form *Puka* in 1583⁴ and we find the forms *Pucha* and *Puuka* in 1634 in the ecclesiastical report by Pietro Maserecco, *Puucha* in 1641 in the report of Frang Bardhi (Francesco Bianchi), *Puua* around 1685 in the report of Giorgio Stampaneo, *Puka* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola, *Puca* in 1691 on the map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli, *Puka* in 1703 in a report of the Catholic archbishop of Bar [Antivari] Vincentius Zmajevich, and *Poucha* in 1821 on the map of French consul Hugues Pouqueville.

The word *Puka* is said to be a corruption of Latin *via publica* 'public road', for which we find the Alb. expression *udhë e pukë* in a text of

Frang Bardhi, the settlement being an important stop on the Roman highway from Lissus (Lezha) to Ulpiana in Kosovo. However, although this Latin *publica* seems to have influenced the Albanian form, it must be secondary in view of earlier forms *Epicaria* and *Piccavia*.

The *bajrak* of Puka was entirely Muslim. It was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Puka tribe were given as follows: 234 households with a total of 1,525 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Blinisht, Buzhala, Dedaj, Duzhneza, Lëvrushk, Midha, Puka and Ukth.⁵

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

A town was founded on Puka tribal land in 1673 to secure the trade route from Gjakova to Prizren from the attacks of the Iballja tribe in Thaçi. It was destroyed soon after the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, but was rebuilt. It had a modest fortification with a circumference of less than a fifth of a mile and with low walls. Only the commander lived in the fortress. The houses of the troops, consisting of Catholics and Muslims alike, were outside the walls. From time to time, the authorities sent out punitive expeditions against the unruly tribes in the region, but with few long-term results.⁶

The French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard reported in the mid-nineteenth century on the ruins of this fortress not far from present-day Puka, which, according to tradition, had been inhabited by an Albanian prince called Paolo Zenta. Several of the families with land around the ruins enjoyed great prestige and claimed to descend from the prince. They added his name to the Turkish names they took on when they converted to Islam. Hecquard adds that among the many noted chieftains of Dukagjin, whose names survived and were recorded by Marinus Barletius, was this Paolo Zenta, a relative of the Lekë Dukagjini, after whom the *kanun* was named.⁷

Travel Impressions

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Puka, which she visited in the spring of 1908:

About 4.30 we arrived at a *han* not far from Puka, men and beasts all tired out, and camped for the night in a field. There was plenty of water. The horses, freed from their packs, were turned out to graze at two pence a head.

Two time-expired soldiers had joined our caravan, one a Moslem Serb from Plevlje, and the other an Albanian from Mitrovitza, both homeward bound. The Serb, a civil fellow, spoke little Albanian and kept quite apart from the others. He was deathly tired, groaned at the thought of the week's tramp yet before him, and rolled over fast asleep upon the ground as soon as we halted.

The *hanjee* provided hay for my bed and a stewed fowl for my supper. The hides were piled high, the horses picketed in line. We sat round a fire on the ground—the two beaky-nosed, grey-eyed Djakova men and the two soldiers. The Serb—though a Turkish subject and a Moslem—appeared to be considered as much a foreigner as myself. There was a red glow of firelight and a crackling shower of sparks as dry brushwood was piled on. The picketed horses munched steadily at a feed of maize. Over all was the intense blue depth of the cloudless night sky, ablaze with a myriad stars. I wondered why people ever lived in houses as I rolled up in my rug on the hay bed.

Two faithful dogs guarded us all night, and had they not chosen my hay as the most comfortable place to sleep in, and barked loudly close to my ear whenever an imaginary danger threatened, I should have slept very well. But to lie awake under the stars is not the misery of sleeplessness in a room—rather it is pure joy. I saw them fade slowly as the dawn crept up—the crescent moon hung low—there came a dash of brilliant yellow over the hills—another day had begun. We rose and shook ourselves, and those that wished went and dipped their hands and face in the stream.

The weary task of pack-saddling began again. I walked with Marko to the brow of one hill and saw over to the land of Berisha.

Puka is a very large tribe of seven bariaks—Puka, Komani, Dushaj, Cheriti, Chiri, Berisha and Merturi-Gurit, and Kabashi. It is partly Moslem and partly Christian. Puka is the gathering-place for all. Three days before they had celebrated

‘Constitution,’ and enjoyed themselves immensely, said the *hanjee*. Now they would like to know what Constitution was.⁸

The Kabashi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Kabashi tribal region is situated in the District of Puka in northern central Albania. It is located on the left (southern) side of the Drin River in an area directly north of the towns of Puka and Fushë Arrëz. Kabashi, which is considered one of the ‘seven tribes of Puka’ (*shtatë bajrakët e Pukës*), borders on the traditional tribal regions of Puka and Qerreti to the west, Dushmani on the other side of the Drin to the northwest, Berisha to the north, Iballja in Thaçi to the east, and Spaçi in Mirdita to the south. It centres on the basin of the Gomina River that flows into the Drin. The main settlements of Kabashi are: Qelëza, Kabash, Meçja, Ukth, Bushat, Dedaj, Micôj and Kryezi.

Population

The term Kabashi occurs as *Gabasu*, a ‘*fortezza di legno in monte*’ (wooden mountain fortress), on the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli, as *Kabasci* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola, as *Kabasi* on the 1691 map of Coronelli, as *Cabassi* in 1621 in an ecclesiastical report by Giezzi Bianco, and as *Cabasci* in 1703 in a report of the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich. The term may also be reflected in the family name Kabasilla, which goes back to the twelfth century.⁹

Kabashi was one of the tribes of the Puka region. It was a *bajrak* and not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor. Karl Steinmetz, who travelled through the region in August 1903, defined Kabashi as having two *bajraks*, Puka and Qelëza.¹⁰ Others have referred to the two *bajraks* as being the Kabashi and the Tërthora in Puka.¹¹

Kabashi was an originally Catholic tribe before its conversion to Islam. The main Catholic church in Kabashi was dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, although there were other churches dedicated to Saint Nicholas, Saint Peter, Saint Jeremiah (Jeremia), Saint Elijah (Ilia) and Saint Veneranda. More importantly, there was also an old Benedictine

abbey of Saint Paul in Grykë-Kabash, southeast of Kodër-Qafaliaj on the right side of the Gomina River, which may have dated back to the middle of the fourteenth century. It was well known in the region in the seventeenth century and, perhaps for this reason, Saint Paul served as patron of the regions of Kabashi and Puka.¹² In about 1930, the Italian geographer Ermanno Armao spoke of Kabashi as being two-thirds Muslim and one-third Catholic.¹³ The Christian tradition has not died out entirely as one still finds some Catholics among the Muslim majority.

Nonetheless, Kabashi is said to have been the first northern Albanian tribe to convert to Islam. This conversion took place in the seventeenth century. The main mosque of Kabashi dates from the mid-nineteenth century.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Kabashi tribe were given as follows: 223 households with a total of 1,494 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Bicaj, Hadroj, Kabash, Micoj, Qelëza, Rrapja and Rrypa.¹⁴

Families of Kabashi tribesmen also migrated to Kosovo where one finds the family name particularly in the regions of Prizren and Vitia.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The Kabashi are said to have emigrated northwards from an original homeland of Kaloja in southern Albania, which was said to be in the region of Janina, now in northern Greece, but which may simply be Kolonja in southeast Albania. The emigration of the Kabashi may have taken place as early as 1500. Baron Nopcsa dates their appearance in the region south of the Drin to before 1600 because they encountered the Dushmani and Qerreti tribes there on their arrival. Tradition has it that they were accorded the region as a reward for the conversion to Islam.¹⁵

The Kabashi tribe was composed traditionally of four leading families: the Kokaj, the Qafaliaj, the Lushaj and the Hadroj. In oral tradition, these families are said to stem from four brothers: Koka Leka, Qafa Leka, Lusha Leka and Hadro Leka, who settled in various parts of present-day Kabashi territory. According to legend, the eldest brother, Koka, was insensed when the youngest brother, Hadro, 'turned Turk', i.e. converted to Islam. Fearful of his brother's wrath, Hadro and his family fled to Kosovo. Koka caught them on their way, while they were crossing the

Vizier's Bridge over the Drin, and shot his brother dead. Kabashi reacted badly to this killing, and leadership of the tribe was given to the second brother, Qafa Leka, whose family later converted to Islam too.¹⁶

An Ottoman document dating from 1571 refers to one Gjini Kabashi in Rrapja, which had 20 households.

At the time of the Bushatliu dynasty in Shkodra, i.e. in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Kabashi held the honour of being the third of the 12 tribes of Leka, coming after Hoti and Oroshi.

We know that a group of Kabashi emigrated to Prizren in 1736. The Russian consul there, Ivan Stepanovič Jastrebov (1839–94), reported that their ancestors had arrived from the Janina region 400 years before his time.¹⁷

Within the Kabashi region there was also a group called the Qelëza, around the current settlement of the same name. The earliest representative of the Qelëza (formerly also Qelza, Čelza) tribe, if we may regard them as a separate tribe, was an autochthonous family called Pervoci that lived around the parish church of Qelëza (the Church of Saint Paul), perhaps in the early fifteenth century. Around 1450, four shepherds arrived from Kçira and settled in Qelëza, too. Nopcsa collected a genealogy of these Qelëza that began with a Mark and his son, Gjoni Marku, and estimated that they lived around the year 1720.¹⁸

The Berisha Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Berisha tribal region is situated south of the Drin River in the present District of Puka in northern Albania, to the west of the settlement of Fierza. Berisha, which is considered one of the 'seven tribes of Puka' (*shtatë bajrakët e Pukës*), borders on the traditional tribal regions of Dushmani and Toplana to the west, Bugjoni to the north, Iballja to the east and Kabashi to the south. Its territory centres on the basin of the Sapaç River that flows into the Drin. According to Baron Nopcsa, the early traditional borders of Berisha were Mount Kunora (Maja e Kunorës) and the Balç Pass (Qafa e Balçit) and from there to Korabi and to a stone tower (*kulla*) near Papi.¹⁹ The main settlements of Berisha, all tiny hamlets, are: Berisha e Vogël (Little Berisha), Shopël and Berisha e Epërme (Upper Berisha).

Population

The term Berisha was recorded as *Berisa* in 1691 on the map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli. Berisha is a common family name, in particular in Kosovo. It is internationally best known in the figure of the political leader Sali Berisha (b. 1944) who was president (1992–7) and prime minister (2005–13) of Albania.

As opposed to the other tribes of Puka, the Berisha were a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor. Indeed they were the only monophyletic tribe in the Dukagjin region south of the Drin.²⁰

The Berisha are a Catholic tribe. In the villages around Peja in Kosovo, where many Berisha settled, they celebrated the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, known as *Zoja e Berishës* (Our Lady of Berisha), traditionally on 15 August. The feast was also known as *Shën Mëri i gushtit* (Saint Mary of August).

As to population statistics, in his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains' in 1841, Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gives the population of Berisha as 16,000, of whom 4,000 were men in arms, although this figure, being very high, probably includes neighbouring tribes.²¹

Johann Georg von Hahn, who travelled through Kosovo in 1858, noted the presence of various Berisha clans in the Karadag mountains on the present border between Kosovo and Macedonia, north of Skopje: 'Almost all of the inhabitants of Karadag²² are Berisha. [...] The Berisha have seven branches: (1) Asqur, (2) Ali Shīça, (3) Dodo, (4) Murtur, (5) Livosh, (6) Kuç, (7) Gec, and these branches divide into even smaller units.'²³

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Berisha tribe were given as follows: 171 households with a total of 1,013 inhabitants.²⁴ It was later said to have a population of some 2,300.²⁵

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The Berisha are reputed to be one of the oldest tribes in the northern mountains, with a genealogy reaching back to about 1360–70,²⁶ and seem to have inhabited what is broadly the same region for centuries. The Berisha people told Edith Durham that they had always been in

their present homeland.²⁷ They are said to be among the ancestors of the now Slavic-speaking Kuči tribe, who go back to 1416, of the Slavic-speaking Piperi and Crnojević tribes, and of the Albanian-speaking Gruda and Mërturi tribes. A distinction was made between White Berisha (the ancestors of present-day Berisha, Mërturi and Piperi) and Red Berisha (the ancestors of the Kuči tribe – *i kuq* meaning ‘red’ in Albanian).

Baron Nopcsa dated the term Berisha at least back to 1510. The legendary ancestral father of the Berisha tribe was called Kol Poga, son of Pog Murri and grandson of Murr Deti (or Murr Dedi). His brother, Lek Poga, was the ancestral father of the closely related Mërturi tribe that separated from Berisha in 1520.

According to legend, Scanderbeg cursed the Berisha of Muhurr when he discovered that they were collaborating with the Turks:

*Or Berish, Berish qeni,
Kërkund vend mos t'zantë kuvendi,
Si n'të raj, si në pleqnajë,
Kurr mos u bafsh tri shpajë.*

(Hounds of Berisha, curse upon you,
May you never find assembly,
May you, young and old, ne'er flourish,
May you never have three houses.)

From the late fifteenth century onwards, the Catholic Berisha were in conflict with the Turks and, in particular, with the neighbouring Kabashi tribe that had converted to Islam. With the help of Kabashi, the Turks were able to conquer virtually all of Berisha territory, with the exception of the church of Berisha. Some of the population was then exiled to the coast and others were sent abroad to a place called Mahmur Dedi.²⁸

Around 1650, the Berisha were involved in serious border skirmishes, in particular with the Thaçi tribe, and lost much territory to them, especially around Iballja. Nopcsa reported that there was still much hostility between Berisha and Thaçi in his day. After the conflict with Thaçi, the Berisha, under their leader Mem i Dodës, were involved in a struggle with Mahmud Begolli Bey of Peja around 1737–40, when the latter led his troops from Gjakova via Vau i Spasit to Shkodra.

Mahmud Begolli Bey is said to have burnt Berisha to ashes, such that the smoke from the raging fires could be seen as far away as Vau i Dejës, near Shkodra. He also seized the bell of the church of Berisha as booty and took many Berisha women and children as his prisoners. For these deeds, he was murdered by Osman Deda of Berisha and Gjonush Pali of Shllaku, both of whom were subsequently executed. The two men were later canonised by the Church for their bloody deed on behalf of their Catholic faith.²⁹

Many Berisha emigrated to the Gjakova region, and there were numerous Berisha settlements to the northwest of the town. There they became Muslim.³⁰ There were also some Berisha in Dibra and Ulcinj.

The Berisha were known among the mountain tribes for their wrath (*Berisha mënin*), as reflected in the popular saying: 'The wisdom of the Gashi, the watchfulness of the Krasniqja, the wrath of the Berisha, the heroism of the Kelmendi, the slyness of the Shala, a snake in the grass like the Thaçi' (*Mënja e Gashit, syni i Krasniqes, inati i Berishës, trimnia e Kelmënit, dredbia e Shaljanit, gjarpnia e Thaçit*).

The Thaçi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Thaçi tribal region is situated in the District of Puka on the left (southern) side of the Drin River in northern Albania. It is basically the region to the south and southeast of Fierza. It borders on the tribal regions of Krasniqja to the north across the Drin River, and Mërturi and Berisha to the west. Thaçi corresponds alternatively to the regions of Bugjoni and Iballja, which are its two *bajraks*, and forms part of the 'seven tribes of Puka' (*shtatë bajrakët e Pukës*). The main settlements of Thaçi are: Bugjon, Porav, Apripa e keqe, Miliská, Arst, Mëzi, and Iballja, which is now its administrative centre.

Population

The term Thaçi was recorded as *Tatschi* in 1867 by Johann Georg von Hahn on his journey through the region.

The Catholic Thaçi tribe consisted of two *bajraks*, Bugjoni and Iballja. The latter, which is geographically separated from the rest of

Thaçi by the Bugjon River and a mountain, was also inhabited by numerous immigrant settlers from Toplana and, in the early twentieth century, it showed a good deal of autonomy from Thaçi proper such that it was sometimes regarded as a tribe of its own.

In his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains' in 1841, Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gives the population of Thaçi as 2,800, of whom 700 were men in arms.³¹

Johann Georg von Hahn, who travelled up the Drin Valley in 1863, reported that Thaçi consisted of 400 households and was divided into four main family groups called Buçaj, Gegaj, Bobi and Brengaçi. Altogether, as he stated, they made up one *bajrak* that stretched along the southern bank of the Drin River.³²

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Thaçi tribe (Bugjon and Iballja) were as follows: 688 households with a total of 4,395 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Bugjon, Fierza, Kokëdoda, Porav, Arst, Dardha, Flet, Iballja, Kulumbria, Kryezi, Miliská, Mëzi, Truen and Xath.³³

Thaçi was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

Of Thaçi origin is the Vokshi tribe that settled in Kosovo in the region between Junik and Deçan, originally in the villages of Junik, Lloçan and Pobërxa. The Helshani, Sopi and Kabashi are also said to have Thaçi ancestry.

The Thaçi were known among the mountain tribes for their snake-like qualities of slyness and deception, as reflected in the popular saying: 'The wisdom of the Gashi, the watchfulness of the Krasniqja, the wrath of the Berisha, the heroism of the Kelmendi, the slyness of the Shala, a snake in the grass like the Thaçi' (*Mënja e Gashit, syni i Krasniqes, inati i Berishës, trimnia e Kelmënit, dredhia e Shaljanit, gjarpnia e Thaçit*). The totem-like association of the Thaçi with the snake or serpent was used during the Kosovo War of 1998–9 when the code name *gjarpëri* (the snake) was given to the KLA leader and subsequent prime minister of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi (b. 1968). There are numerous Thaçi families in the Drenica region.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The Thaçi area was populated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by the Thaçi and Bobi tribes that came originally from the coastal region (Zadrime, Lezha). Baron Nopcsa, who investigated the origins of the Thaçi tribe in about 1909, reports the following:

The ancestors of the Thaçi tribe came from Muriqan in Anamali on the territory of present-day Montenegro and, for this reason, the surrounding tribes make fun of the Thaçi by saying that they stem from the Slavs. I was not able to ascertain who the ancestral father of the Thaçi was, but tradition holds that he settled in Bushat, from where one of his descendants, Bib Bushati, fled into the mountains of Berisha around 1450–80 and settled in Fusha e Thaçit. From Fusha e Thaçit, Bib Bushati's descendant, Gjeci, moved to Kodra e Gegës in Kryeziu territory. There he had three sons: Geg Gjeci, Buç Gjeci and Pren Gjeci, who lived in the second half of the sixteenth century. The brothers initially lived in harmony with one another, but one day, Buç and Geg decided to convert to the Muslim faith. As they were afraid of Pren Gjeci's reaction, they hid their intention from him. Buç converted first, but when Geg's turn came, he grew fearful of the consequences of such a step because he was afraid of his elder brother Pren. He endeavoured rather to reconcile Pren and his other brother Buç, who had already abandoned his original faith. For Pren's sake, Geg went back on his intention of becoming a Muslim, but at the same time, for Buç's sake, he promised that neither he nor his descendants would ever eat pork. Because of the younger brother's intervention, Pren decided not to kill Buç as he had originally resolved to do, and the brothers separated after this conflict. Buç became the ancestral father of the Muslim Thaçi in Iballja. Geg founded Bugjon and Gralisht, and Pren became the ancestral father of the rest of the Thaçi.

All of Geg Gjeci's descendants kept his pledge until 1908 and it was only in 1909 that some of them began to keep pigs and eat pork. The fact that some families in Bugjon had begun to keep pigs became widely known and was talked about, and there was almost a shoot-out in the village between the conservative side who remained true to the pledge and the liberal side who favoured

the change. The chief of the conservative side was later forced under protest to put up with the new regulation. However, he himself refused even to touch a pig.

When the three brothers separated, the whole region of Bugjon and Gralisht belonged to the Kojeli, i.e. the Berisha. The position of the Thaçi who had newly arrived in Iballja was therefore arduous. For this reason, the newcomers placed themselves under the protection of the ancestors of Liman Aga. Initially, the protection was to their advantage because they succeeded in pushing the Berisha out, down to the Lumi i Dardhës (Dardha River). Later, however, their liege lord, a certain Sulejman Aga, began to bully them and even went so far as to demand of Bal Alija, who lived around 1780, that he bring a sheaf of grain back from a mountainside where grain did not grow. This was not the end of it. He scolded Bal Alija and sent him back up the mountain. This deed led to a revolt among the Thaçi against their landowner. They refused to recognise his authorities and the conflict has resulted in a good number of persistent skirmishes up to recent times. Because the Bugjoni drove the Berisha out, there is still hereditary hostility between the two tribes today, and a murder committed between them cannot be atoned for with money.³⁴

The unruly Thaçi tribe proved to be difficult to subdue in the Ottoman period. From time to time, the Turkish authorities, holed up in the fortress of Puka, sent out punitive expeditions against them. In 1744, the homes of 105 families in Iballja were burned to the ground and the tribe was resettled in the Gjakova region. Soon, however, they began returning to their homeland, having reached agreements with the authorities and with the neighbouring tribes.³⁵ Such punitive resettlement policies as practiced by the Ottoman authorities rarely worked.

Travel Impressions

The German geographer Ami Boué (1794–1881) travelled through the mountains of Thaçi in the late 1830s and reported as follows on his arrival in the little village of Flet.

Thereafter, one descends gradually to the bed of a large torrent that flows from west to east and has to climb back up for about an hour

to reach Flet, a village consisting of 19 scattered houses with 16 Catholic families and 9 Muslim ones. A quarter of an hour before the village, one leaves the torrent and follows the course of one of its tributaries that flows down from the northeastern slope of Qafa e Malit, whereas the large torrent takes its source to the west, in the southern or rather southwestern extension of the same range.

Flet, at 2,066 feet in elevation, has two inns and two or three other houses that are visible in the valley which is otherwise occupied by pastures, whereas the slopes of Qafa e Malit to the east and those of the mountains to the south of the large torrent are covered in fir trees and pine trees. There also seem to be the ruins of a small fortress here, if I am not mistaken. We took up residence in the lower inn which is the better of the two and had not only a large stable but also a very clean *çardak* [open balcony] with a large wooden armchair, the *fron* [throne] of the Albanians. This was the first time we had seen this type of furniture which is to be encountered in many of the Catholic inns in Albania. It seems to be reserved for the parish priest on his visits or for the *gjobar* [fine-collector] or *plak* [elder] of the villages. Some Turkish pilgrims had arrived before us and had taken possession of the *çardak* where they plagued us with their songs and prayers. We were therefore forced to content ourselves with a large wooden platform with holes in it and with no roof, but it was situated right under a splendid walnut tree. What is more, they had both chickens and eggs to offer, but the wine and bread that they brought us were limited in quantity. There were no spirits, and the bread was made of maize.³⁶

The Bosnian Croatian priest, Lovro Mihačević, travelled from Berisha to Thaçi in the summer of 1907 and remarked:

The next afternoon, we continued our journey from Berisha to Iballja. We hiked up and down steep, stony trails, through forests and bush land, and passed many villages and hamlets until we reached our destination in the evening.

Iballja is famous throughout Albania not only for its central location between Shkodra, Prizen and Gjakova, but also for its valiant and heroic inhabitants. Iballja is a veritable oasis, a lush

and verdant plateau in the otherwise arid mountains of Albania. The inhabitants, both Muslims and Catholics, are brave and hearty men who are ardent promoters of peace, fraternal harmony and modern enlightenment. Near the parsonage, they used to have a school, but it burned down in 1906 and could not be rebuilt. The Muslims have their mosque.

The people of Iballja are more or less independent of the Turkish government. Although they recognise the decisions taken on important matters by the *kajmakam* in the village of Puka, they have two rich and respected Muslim families in their own village, the Lamanaga and the Mustafaga, who arbitrate in local conflicts in the region. The ancestors of the Mustafaga were given great privileges by the sultan. Mustafaga himself, however, was later accused of treason and abuse of power and lost not only all of his privileges but all of this wealth. Through clever and undaunted action, nonetheless, this capable man later managed to regain what he had lost. How he survived and regained the sultan's confidence is another story. He is an educated and tolerant fellow and enjoys talking to Catholic clergymen, who in this region are of the Franciscan order. He also offers them shelter in his home and even enjoys letting them read mass in his house. In general, the Muslims and the Catholics get along very well here.

Many villages of Albania, both Catholic and Muslim, celebrate the feast day of Saint Nicholas the Bishop. This is particularly true of Iballja.³⁷

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Thaçi, which she visited in the spring of 1908:

We entered into a desolate wilderness of sandhills—or rather hills of earth so friable that it disintegrates at every shower, and no blade nor leaf can find a hold upon it. Nor was there any living creature—nothing but round bare hills, fantastically water-hewn, and dead as the mountains in the moon. Part of the track had to be taken very carefully—a narrow, friable ledge high along the mountain-side.

We got down into Arshi [Arst]—a fertile valley, an arm of Mirdite land, the bariak of Spachi, that runs into Puka—and pulled up at midday at Han Arshit.

Han Arshit provided nothing—not even coffee.

Marko and I ate the remains of last night's fowl which we had saved. The wretched horse that had fallen over the cliff the day before was dead lame, and had to be left at the *han*.

Trade, said the *hanjee*, was not what it was in the old days. Then a hundred horses at a time were often put up at the *han*. The railway to Salonika had ruined Albania by diverting all the traffic that used to go to Scutari and Durazzo. They were all being starved out; nothing but the long-talked-of railway to the Adriatic could save the land—let the Constitution hurry up with it.

Arshi lies on a river—Ljumi Gojanit. We followed it up a stony valley, steeper and steeper, to its source at the top of the pass, Chafa Malit.

There is a joy that never palls—the first glimpse into the unknown land. On the other side of the pass, a magnificent valley lay below us, thickly wooded with beech, and beyond were the lands which two rival races each claim as their birthright—one of the least-known corners of Europe.

I hurried eagerly down the steep descent on foot, by a rough track to Flet. Flet is Moslem, save for six families, all large; one, consisting of fifty members, showed quite an imposing group of stone houses. A church, but three years old, served occasionally by the priest of Dartha [Dardha], showed trim and white.

We pushed on to Han Zaa [Xath]. The *han* was shut up. The *hanjee*, on being summoned, said he could supply nothing—nothing at all, and that there were neither fowls nor eggs in the neighbourhood. He gave us leave, however, to pick as many beans as we liked from his field for twopence. The two soldiers started bean-picking, and I shucked industriously. Marko sent a child foraging for a fowl, and went to borrow a cauldron. An ancient hen was produced, and Marko, who is a perfect camp cook, had it simmering in a huge pot of beans within half-an-hour. The *hanjee* volunteered two wooden ladles and a large bowl, and in due time we fed the entire company off beans stewed with hen. As they would otherwise have had nothing but the remains of the day before yesterday's maize bread, this put all in high good humour. I declined a kind offer that I should sleep in the lee of the pile of odoriferous hides, lay down on a heap of hay about 10 p.m., and slept right through till

half-past five next morning, when I was surprised to find I had rolled into a dry ditch, and had slept on top of Marko's thick walking stick and a large stone.³⁸

The Mali i Zi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Mali i Zi (also Malziu) tribal region is situated in the District of Kukës in northeastern Albania. It is located on the left (southern) side of the Drin River along the old Shkodra–Prizren road, about 10 kilometres to the west of the town of Kukës. Mali i Zi, which despite its proximity to Kukës and Luma is considered one of the 'seven tribes of Puka' (*shtatë bajrakët e Pukës*), borders on the traditional tribal regions of Thaçi to the north and northwest, Hasi across the Drin River to the northeast, Luma across the Black Drin River to the east, and Mirdita to the south and west. The main settlements of Mali i Zi are: Kalimash, Kolsh, Kryemadh, Shtana, Mëgulla, Shënmëria (Shëmria) and Shikaj.

Population

The tribal region of Mali i Zi, meaning 'Black Mountain', is not to be confused with Mali i Zi, the Albanian-language term for Montenegro (also meaning Black Mountain), or with Mali i Zi, also known as Karadag or Skopska Crna Gora, the mountain range that now forms the eastern part of the border between Kosovo and the Republic of Macedonia.

The term Mali i Zi, seemingly from Alb. *mal* 'mountain' and *i zi* 'black' was first recorded in 1444: '*opidum Dagni cum Satbo et Cerna Gora vel Mali Ixii*'. It occurs as *Montagna Nera* in 1515 in the Breve memoria di Giovanni Musachi; as *Monte Nero* in 1637 in the report of the Albanian bishop of Sappa and Sarda, Frang Bardhi (Francesco Bianchi); and as *Malzi* in an ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari in 1671. It is said to have this name from the black pines (*pinus negra*) that once covered the mountains there. It may also be a loan translation from Serbian *crnogorica* 'conifer'.

Mali i Zi was a Muslim tribe of one *bajrak*, consisting traditionally of about 3,000 inhabitants. It was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from

one common ancestor. Like neighbouring Luma and Lura, Mali i Zi was an ethnographic region of mixed origin, but with a distinct history and identity. There were families of Morina origin in the settlements of Petkaj, Shikaj, Shpataj and Mëgulla; there were Gashi in Shtana; Krasniqja in Shikaj; Berisha in Pista; and Shala in the village of Dukagjin.³⁹

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Mali i Zi tribe were given as follows: 385 households with a total of 2,528 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Dukagjin, Kalimash, Kryemadh, Mëgulla, Petkaj, Pista, Shënmëria (Shëmria), Shikaj and Spas.⁴⁰

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Predominant in the early history of Mali i Zi was the Gegaj clan of Petkaj. Their ancestral father Gega, who came from Spaç in Mirdita, had three sons: Ndreu, Preçi and Papi. Ndreu was the father of the Hasanaj, Shabanaj, Isufaj, Avdiaj, Metaj, Idrizaj and Halilaj families. Preçi was the father of the Kobi family, some members of which emigrated to the region of Peja, and from Papi stemmed the Brungaj and subsequently branches of the Metaj, Hasanaj, Sejdiaj, Imeraj, Çoba, Profka and Beqiri families. Other prominent clans were the Kovaçi, said to be from southern Albania, and the Simoni or Simonsi, originally from Mirdita.⁴¹

As elsewhere in the region, the early history of the Mali i Zi tribe was characterised by frequent fighting with Ottoman forces to avoid paying taxes and handing over conscripts, in particular in the years 1565, 1568, 1579, 1580, 1582, 1584, 1588, 1602, 1614, 1638 and 1680.

One early record of the tribe tells of a Sali Dema of the Gegaj clan who fought in Greece in 1730 and received the title of 'agha'.⁴²

Johann Georg von Hahn, who travelled up the Drin Valley in 1863, reported that the Mali i Zi tribe had its origin in Koman much farther down on the Drin: 'I was unable to find any legends about Komana although it is extremely likely that Komana is the tribal origin of all of the inhabitants of Mali i Zi, who are said to have emigrated from there.'⁴³

In 1850, a certain Demë Simoni led Mali i Zi fighters in an uprising against Jusuf Begu of Puka. Following an Ottoman punitive expedition in 1894, the Mali i Zi tribe rose again under Rexhep Aga, Tahir Sinani of Kalimash and Hasan Rrahmani of Çam. They set upon the

representatives of the Porte, based in Puka, and expelled Fejzulla Bey from their territory.

In November and December 1912, Mali i Zi was occupied by Serbian forces invading northeastern Albania, and hundreds were killed on both sides in fighting, in particular at Vau i Spasit and Flet. Mention is made in the spring of 1913 notably of a cannon made of pear wood that fired three shots at Serbian forces, opposed by Halil Mustafa, whereby 24 tribesmen were killed.⁴⁴

As one of the 'seven tribes of Puka', Mali i Zi was led by the *bajraktar* of the Skaci/Skacaj family in Mëgulla. He was killed in a battle with Montenegrin forces and, to his family's great shame, the tribe's standard (*bajrak*) was captured. The date of this event, recorded in oral history, is unknown. The next *bajraktar* of Mali i Zi lived in Shikaj and was of Krasniqja origin.⁴⁵

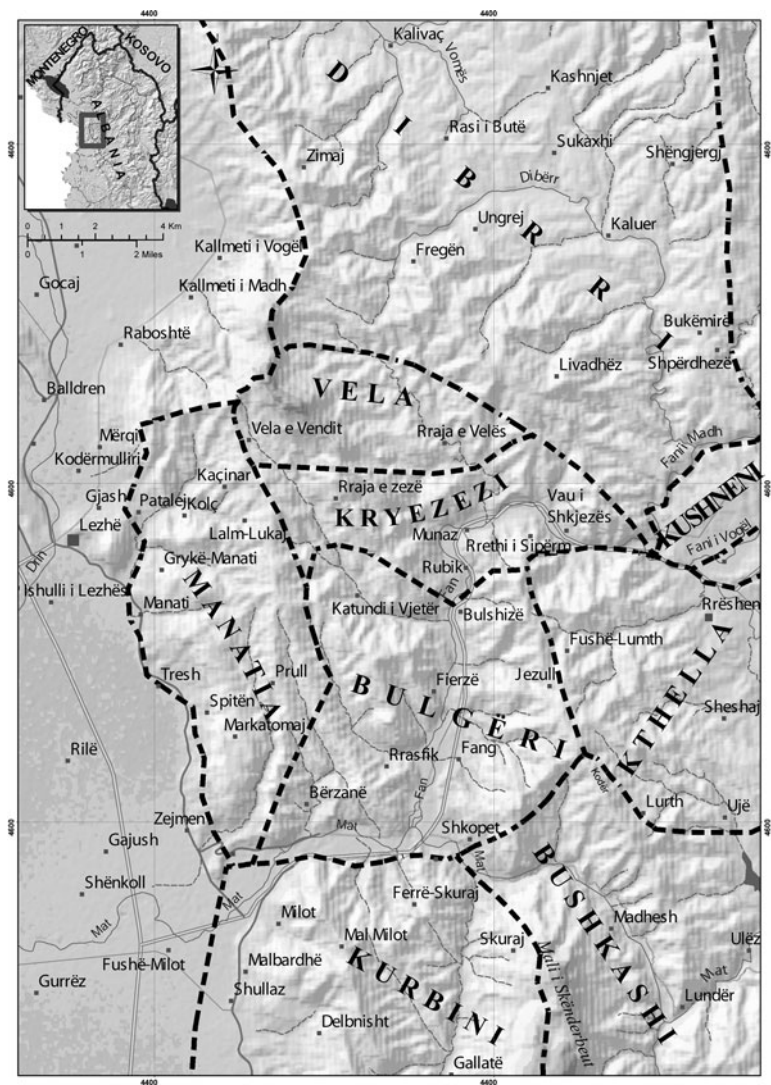
Travel Impressions

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Mali i Zi, which she visited in the spring of 1908:

Having crossed, we went back up the river to a point opposite Han Brutit. And I saw that there were two, not one, tributary streams by the *han*, and that Brutit, the village, lay high on the hill between them, not on the river-brink as in the map.

Striking uphill from the Drin, we reached a fine grassy plateau and village, Kolchi [Kolsh], and then came to a tributary of the Drin that flows into it, opposite to and rather above Han Brutit.

We rode up its right bank till it forked in two, then followed its right branch, bore to the left away from it, and came out on the top of the watershed. Here, on a grassy plateau, is the village of Mali i zi. The whole district is called Mali i zi (Black Mountain). According to the map we should then have been on the mountain-side above the Drin; but the men assured me that Drin was far, and we were on the other side of the mountain.⁴⁶



The tribal regions of the Lezha Highlands

CHAPTER 6

THE TRIBES OF THE LEZHA HIGHLANDS (*MALËSIA E LEZHËS*)

The Bulgëri Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Bulgëri tribal region is situated in the Districts of Lezha and Mirdita in northern central Albania. It is located along the banks of the Mat and lower Fan rivers, approximately from Milot to Rubik. Bulgëri borders on the Mat River to the south, and on the traditional tribal regions of Manatia to the west, Kryezezi to the north, and Kthella to the east. The main settlements of Bulgëri are: Bërzana, Fang, Fierza, Rasfik and Bulgër (now Katundi i Vjetër).

Population

The term Bulgëri occurs as the toponym *Bulgari* in the 1866 memoir of French diplomat Emile Wiet, who estimated the population of this tribe to be 97 households.¹ In 1905, Karl Steinmetz estimated it to be 110 households.² The Bulgëri were a Catholic tribe, like those of the rest of the region.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Bulgëri tribe were given as follows: 122 households with a total of 769 inhabitants. This comprised the settlement and surroundings of Bulgër.³

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Bulgëri and the other three *bajraks* of Lezha (Kryezezi, Manatia and Vela) joined Mirdita in 1818, giving the Mirdita tribe a total of 12 *bajraks*.

Figures of Note

Preng Doçi

The political and religious figure and poet, Preng Doçi (1846–1917), known in Italian as Primus Docci, was born in Bulgër and studied at the Kolegjia Papnore Shqyptare (Albanian Pontifical Seminary) in Shkodra and at the College of the Propaganda Fide in Rome. In 1871, he returned to the Catholic Mirdita region to serve as a parish priest in Korthpula, Orosh, and, subsequently, in Kalivarja near Spaç. He was among the leaders of the Mirdita uprising against Ottoman rule in 1876–7. In preparation for this rebellion, Doçi travelled to Cetinje, the mountain capital of Montenegro, to seek financial and military assistance. Although the northern Albanian tribes were equally suspicious of Montenegrin designs on their homeland, they had agreed this time to ‘shake hands with their southern Slavic brothers in order to resist the burden they jointly bore’. Though Doçi managed to return from Cetinje with a pledge of Montenegrin assistance and, equally important, a promise of non-interference, the rebellion proved a failure and was put down by Turkish troops in March 1877. Preng Doçi was captured, exiled to Constantinople, but was later released and expelled to Rome. From the Vatican, Cardinal Simeoni of the Propaganda Fide sent him to the west coast of Newfoundland where he worked as a missionary until 1881. To Doçi goes the honour, as far as can be ascertained, of being the first known Albanian resident of North America. Western Newfoundland’s rugged coastline and inhospitable climate, however, proved too much for Doçi, whose desire it was to return to his Mediterranean homeland. As an initial compromise, the Vatican transferred him to St John in New Brunswick, where he worked from October 1881 to March 1883. After his return to Rome, he was sent on another missionary assignment, this time to India as secretary of the apostolic delegate to India, Cardinal Agliardi. In 1888, after years of petitioning and with the intercession of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Preng Doçi finally received permission from the Ottoman authorities to return to Albania. In January of the following year, he was consecrated

head of the Abbey Nullius of Saint Alexander of Orosh in Mirdita, a position that enabled him to exercise considerable political and religious influence in the region for many years to come. In 1897, he travelled to Vienna to propose the creation of an autonomous Catholic principality in northern Albania under Mirdita leadership. Two years later, in 1899, he founded the *Shoqnia e bashkimit të gjuhës shqipe* (Society for the Unity of the Albanian Language), usually known as the *Bashkimi* (Unity) literary society, together with Ndoc Nikaj and Gjergj Fishta, and devised the so-called *Bashkimi* alphabet.

The Kryezezi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Kryezezi tribal region is situated in the District of Mirdita in northern central Albania. It is located on the right (northern) side of the Fan River from the point where the Greater Fan (Fan i Madh) and Lesser Fan (Fan i Vogël) rivers unite down to about Rubik. Kryezezi borders on the traditional tribal regions of Vela to the north, Manatia to the west, Bulgëri to the south, and Dibrri in Mirdita to the east. The main settlements of Kryezezi are Rubik, Munaz, Vau i Shkježës, and the now abandoned Kryez.

Population

The term Kryezezi, meaning 'black head', occurs as the toponym *Criesesi* in the 1866 memoir of French diplomat Emile Wiet, who estimated the population of the tribe to be 60 households.⁴ In 1905, Karl Steinmetz estimated the population of Kryezezi to be 120 households.⁵

The Kryezezi were a Catholic tribe like those of the rest of the region. It was in their tribal region, on a cliff overlooking the Fan River, that the ancient monastery of Rubik (Rubigo) was founded by the Benedictines. The Church of the Holy Saviour, the only remnant of the monastery there, was later taken over by the Franciscans and restored in 1782 and 1837.⁶

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Kryezezi tribe were given as follows: 138 households with a total of 879 inhabitants. This comprised the settlement and surroundings of Kryez.⁷

Kryezezi consisted of one *bajrak*. In 1818, together with the other three *bajraks* of Lezha (Bulgëri, Manatia and Vela), it joined Mirdita, giving the Mirdita tribe a total of 12 *bajraks*.

Travel Impressions

During his visit to Kryezezi in August 1905, Karl Steinmetz described the tribe as peaceloving:

The population is exceptionally destitute and has been on the verge of starvation for many years. Despite this, it is the most peaceloving of all the Catholic tribes of northern Albania. Unlike their neighbours, Mirdita, Kthella and Bushkashi, they are not focussed on plundering in the lowlands. No murders have been committed even on their own territory for years now.⁸

Edith Durham left the following impressions of Rubik and Kryezezi, which she visited in the summer of 1908 on her way back from Mirdita:

Time did not permit further wandering in Kthela [Kthella]. I left it for Robigo [Rubik], where, said the priest, I should find good quarters at the Franciscan's. The Kthela lad volunteered to guide us again. Passing through Rsheni [Rrëshen], where there is a flourishing school—due to the energy of the local priest—we descended to the Fani i vogel, followed it, and crossed it just above its junction with the Fani i madh (which is, I believe, the same river whose source I saw on the Chafa Malit, under a different name). Here there is a piece of debatable land, claimed both by Mirdita and the tribes of the Alessio Mountains, over which there has been so much bloodshed, that for the time being it has been left by both, and the trees have grown tall and fine. Then we pounded along the shingly half-dried bed of the united Fanis till, as evening was closing in, we saw the church of Robigo high on a crag above the river, approached it on the wrong side, found no track in the dim light, and scrambled up on foot.

I was extremely surprised on the top to find a large block of buildings, and not at all surprised to be met by a stern and foreign Franciscan and the word '*clausura*.' It was a friary, and he could do no other than refuse me admission. My faithful guides

were horrified. As usual with Albanians, they cared no pin for Church rule when it ran counter to Albanian custom. Hospitality to a stranger guest was a sacred duty. To refuse it was an outrage on the Albanian people. They told the foreign Franciscan their opinion of him. They would, I believe, have spoken in like manner to the Pope himself. I was anxious only to go and find other shelter before it was pitch-dark.

The foreign Franciscan, naturally, remained unmoved by the tale of my many virtues and the quantities of ecclesiasts much higher than himself who were only too glad to know me. But he sent a boy to guide us to possible quarters.

We forded the river in the dark, and stumbled along to a large house, whose owner received us at once, lamenting only that he had not been warned in time to make preparations. To all he had we were welcome. A ladder in the dark led us to a great cavernous room devoid of all furniture and lighted only by the fire that blazed beneath the huge hood that reached from the raftered roof to within some three feet of the floor. We sat round it with the large family. Our host was very angry at my rejection by the friary. I said in vain that they could not do otherwise. It was an insult, he said, to Albanian hospitality. He made broad remarks on the celibacy of the clergy, heard with great interest of all our wanderings, but only returned to rage that I should have gone so far and have been insulted at Robigo. Nor would he look on it in any other light.⁹

The Manatia Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Manatia tribal region is situated in the District of Lezha in northern central Albania. It is located in the mountains directly east of the town of Lezha and extends southwards in the direction of the Mat River. Manatia borders on the traditional tribal regions of Vela, Kryezezi and Bulgëri to the east, the Mat River to the south, and the lowlands of Lezha and Zadrime to the west and north. The main settlements of Manatia are: Manatia and Grykë-Manati, Lalm-Lukaj and Kapruell (now Prull).

Population

The term Manatia for the region and tribe occurs as *Emanatia* in 1621 in the ecclesiastical report of Benedetto Orsini Ragusino; as *Manatia* in 1672 in the report of Giorgio Vladagni; as *Manatia* in the 1866 memoir of French diplomat Emile Wiet; and as *Manattia* on the 1928 map of Herbert Louis.

The Manatia were a Catholic tribe, like those of the rest of the region. Above Grykë-Manati, on the left bank of the Manatia creek, there was a Church of Saint Michael (Kisha e Shën Mëhillit), a popular saint in the region. It seems to date from the early twentieth century.

In the 1860s, Emile Wiet estimated the population of Manatia to be 82 households.¹⁰ In 1905, Karl Steinmetz estimated it to be 75 households.¹¹

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Manatia tribe were given as follows: 96 households with a total of 629 inhabitants. This comprised the settlement and surroundings of Manatia.¹²

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Manatia consisted of one *bajrak*. In 1818, together with the other three *bajraks* of Lezha (Bulgëri, Kryezezi and Vela), it joined Mirdita, giving the Mirdita tribe a total of 12 *bajraks*.

The Vela Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Vela tribal region¹³ is situated in the District of Mirdita in northern central Albania. It is located in the basin of the Vela River that flows to the east of Mount Vela into the Fan River to the north of Rubik. Vela borders on the traditional tribal regions of Kryezezi to the south, Dibrrri in Mirdita to the north and east, and Manatia and the Zadrima region to the west. The main settlements of Vela are Rreja e Velës to the east of the mountain, and Vela on the western slope.

Population

The tribal term Vela derives from the name of nearby Mount Vela (Mali i Velës, 1,770 m.). It was first recorded as *Monti di Velia* in the 1621

ecclesiastical report of Benedetto Orsini Ragusino; as *Velia* in the 1629 report of Benedetto Orsini Ragusino; as *Monte di Veglia* in 1641 in the report of Albanian bishop of Sappa and Sarda, Frang Bardhi (Francesco Bianchi); as *Veglia* in 1641 in the report of Marco Scura; as *Vellia* in 1694 in the report of Nicolò Vladagni; and as *Veglia* in the 1866 memoir of French diplomat Emile Wiet.

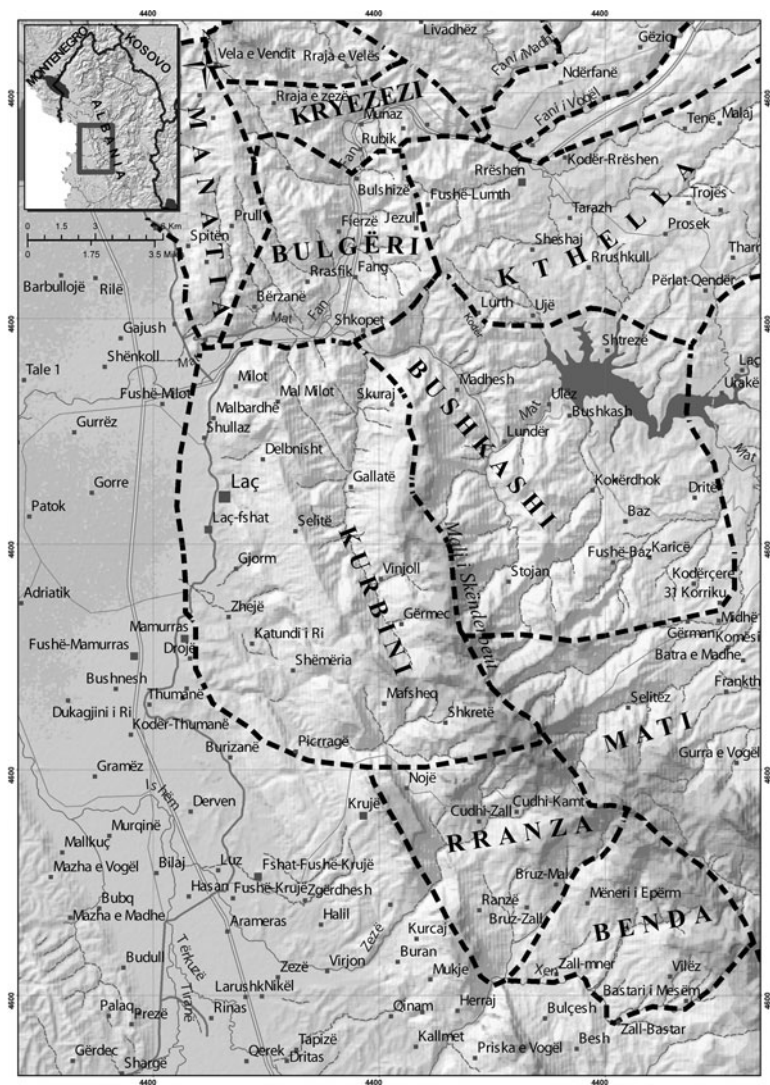
The Vela were a Catholic tribe, like those of the rest of the region. In and around the settlement of Vela there were a number of Catholic churches: the Church of the Holy Saviour (Kisha e Shën Shelbuemit) first mentioned in 1636, with the present building dating from the early twentieth century; the Church of Saint Veneranda (Kisha e Shën Prendës) first mentioned by Orsini in 1629; the Church of Saint Alexander (Kisha e Sh'Llezrit) on the peak of Mount Vela which the tribes visited on a pilgrimage once a year; and the Church of Saint John (Kisha e Shën Gjinit) to the south of the Vela River on the hill of Malung.¹⁴

Emile Wiet estimated the population of Vela to be 108 households in his day.¹⁵ In 1905, Karl Steinmetz estimated it to be 74 households.¹⁶

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Vela tribe were given as follows: 130 households with a total of 840 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Rreja e Velës and Vela.¹⁷

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Vela consisted of one *bajrak*. In 1818, together with the other three *bajraks* of Lezha (Bulgëri, Kryezezi and Manatia), it joined Mirdita, giving the Mirdita tribe a total of 12 *bajraks*.



The tribal regions of the Kruja Highlands

CHAPTER 7

THE TRIBES OF THE KRUJA HIGHLANDS (*MALËSIA E KRUJËS*)

The Kurbini Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Kurbini tribal region is situated in the District of Kurbin (Laç) in northern central Albania. It is located in the mountains immediately to the east of the town of Laç and includes the basin of the Hurdhaz River that flows northwards into the Mat River. Kurbini borders on the traditional tribal regions of Bushkashi to the east and Benda to the south, on the Mat River to the north, and on the coastal plain of Laç to the west. The main traditional settlements of Kurbini are: Milot, Skuraj, Shullaz, Delbnisht, Gallata, Gjonëm, Zheja and Mafsheq. Its market town is Laç.

Population

Kurbin or Kurbini, referring to the tribe and the region, was known as *Corvinus* in Latin. It was recorded historically as *Curbin* in 1570 in the anonymous *Relazione dell'Albania*; as *Corbini* in a 1621 letter of Pjetër Budi; as *Corbini* around 1685 in a report by Giorgio Stampaneo; and as *Corbino* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola. There is also reference to a Benedictine monastery called S. Veneranda de Curbino.¹ If the term Kurbini is related to Latin *Corvinus*, it would seem to derive from Latin *corvus* 'crow, raven', Alb. *korb*

'raven'. Indeed, large numbers of ravens existed in the region until recently. They descended onto the swampy plain of Laç at night and returned to the mountains in the daytime. An Italian expression, *popolo dai capelli corvini* 'raven-haired people', is also recorded, which may have something to do with the tribal designation, too.

Kurbini was one of the three *bajraks* of the Kruja region, and had close relations with the other two, Benda and Rranza. It was a primarily Catholic tribe. It was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor. It is an ethnographic region with a good degree of collective identity.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Kurbini tribe were given as follows: 253 households with a total of 2,209 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Brretja, Gallata, Gjonëm, Mafsheq, Milot, Shkreta, Shullaz and Zheja.²

History

The earliest settlements in Kurbini territory were in the hills and mountains. The swampy and mosquito-infested coastal plain was only used as winter pastureland for the herds and was largely uninhabited until the twentieth century.

The historical centre of the Kurbini tribe was Skuraj, which was known from the time of Scanderbeg and was the home of the *bajraktar*. An early, perhaps legendary, figure of Kurbini was Kokë Malçi of Skuraj, a farmer who is said to have met Scanderbeg and advised him on how to attack and defeat the Turkish forces that were camped at Fusha e kuqe near Milot. Another early figure was Ndue Skuraj, a tribal leader of Kurbini, who departed for Italy, presumably during the Ottoman occupation. He left behind two children and a baby who were taken care of by the tribe, and returned to get them 15 years later. Little else is known about him.

Representatives of the Kurbini tribe took part, with Mirdita, in the movement of the League of Prizren in 1878–81. Like many of the mountain tribes in the late Ottoman period, they voiced their opposition to paying taxes and providing conscripts. This opposition led to armed resistance to the Turkish authorities, in particular in 1881, when the *kullas* of the Pervizaj family and of other notables were burned down by

Dervish Pasha. Other uprisings followed, led in particular by Gjin Pjetri, also known as Gjin Pjetër Mark Pervizaj, of Skuraj. In the spring of 1904, the tribes of Kurbini and Kruja gathered at the Plain of Tallajbesa near Kruja where, under Gjin Pjetri and Dullë Kulla, they defeated a Turkish contingent. In early August 1906, the elders of Kurbini gathered at Delbnisht, where they elected Gjin Pjetri as their leader (and thus their *bajraktar*) and enforced their own code of customary law, the Kanun of the *bajrak* of Kurbini. In August 1909, after the Young Turk revolution, the elders of Kurbini gathered in Gjonëm to call for the creation of the first Albanian-language schools in Milot and Gjonëm. Such schools had been forbidden under Turkish rule. In the spring of 1912 there was a general uprising of the tribes of Kurbini and the highlands of Lezha, again under the leadership of Gjin Pjetri, and a significant victory was gained over Turkish forces at Milot on the banks of the Mat River on 22 June of that year. Shortly thereafter, in July 1912, government forces surrounded and burned down the *kulla* of Gjin Pjetri in Skuraj, but were soon on the withdrawal. In August 1912, two months before the outbreak of the first Balkan War and three months before the declaration of Albanian independence, fighters from Kurbini, Bregu i Matit and Kthella set off from Milot to attack Durrës, although by this time the Turkish government had agreed to local demands. The attack was not completely senseless because its real aim was to get hold of the weaponry stored at the Turkish arms depot there.

In November 1912, Dom Nikollë Kaçorri (1862–1917), one of the leading figures of Albanian independence, gave Gjin Pjetri an Albanian flag in Rubik. This was the flag that was raised at Milot in a festive atmosphere in the presence of the leaders and population of Kurbini.

Figures of Note

Prenk Pervizi

Born in the village of Skuraj in Kurbini tribal territory, Prenk Pervizi (1897–1977), also known as Preng Previzi, was a noted military figure of the 1930s and 1940s. He attended secondary school in Shkodra and a military academy in Vienna. He returned to Albania in 1918 and played an active role in the creation of armed forces after the Congress of Lushnja in 1920. In June 1924 he followed Ahmet Zogu (1895–1961)

into exile in Yugoslavia, and returned with him in December of that year, taking over the region of Lezha. Pervizi was one of Zogu's four officers (the quadrumvirate of chiefs) who played a major role in the Albanian military in the coming years, in particular in the suppression of anti-Zogist uprisings and in making Zogu's rule absolute. From 1929 to 1934, he attended military colleges in Turin and Florence and accompanied Italian troops as a representative of the Albanian army during the Italian military campaign in Abyssinia in 1935–6. He was in Korça at the time of the Italian invasion in April 1939 and helped King Zog and his family escape to Greece. Pervizi, however, returned to Korça. In the Italo-Greek war of 1940–1, working with the Italians, he commanded Albanian forces in the Korça region. In the end, he and his men retreated from the front and Mussolini subsequently used them as scapegoats to explain the Italian defeat in Greece. In April 1943, Pervizi was appointed to command a new Albanian brigade and then headed the Albanian army formed at the Conference of Mukja in August 1943. When Italy capitulated on 8 September 1943, he took over command of the Albanian armed forces from General Dalmazzo (b. 1886) and was named minister of defence in October of that year, with the rank of a general. His opposition to German interference in domestic Albanian military affairs caused him to take to the hills with his men and join the British mission, with which he remained until October 1944. When the communists took power in November 1944, he went into hiding, spending two years in the mountains of Kurbini while waiting for an Allied intervention that never materialised. In September 1946, he escaped to Greece and lived there for 19 years. The final years of his life were spent in Belgium, where he died.

The Rranza Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Rranza (formerly also Rranxia, Rranxhia) tribal region is situated in the southeastern part of the District of Kruja in northern central Albania. It is located about eight kilometres southeast of the town of Kruja, around Mount Gamtit (Mali i Gamtitit, 1,268 m.). Rranza borders on the traditional tribal region of Benda to the east, on the area of Kruja to the north, and the coastal plain of Tirana to the west and

south. The main settlements of Rranza are: Rranza, Barkanesh, Mukja and Virjon.

Population

The term Rranza would seem to be related to Gheg *rranzë* 'foot (of a mountain)', standard Albanian *rrëzë*.

Rranza was one of the three *bajraks* of the Kruja region, and had close relations with the other two, Benda and Kurbini.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Rranza tribe were given as follows: 79 households with a total of 423 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Barkanesh, Mukja and Virjon.³

The Benda Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Benda (or Bena) tribal region is situated in the Districts of Kruja and Tirana in northern central Albania. It is located in the upper basin of the Tërkuza River about 15 kilometres northeast of the city of Tirana. Benda borders on the traditional tribal region of Rranza to the west, and the Mat region to the north and east. The main settlements of Benda are: Cudhin, Bruzja, Mëner, Vilza and Bastar.

Population

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Benda tribe were given as follows: 317 households with a total of 1,643 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Bruzja, Cudhin, Dusha, Frallesh, Kumardha and Mëner.⁴

Benda was one of the three *bajraks* of the Kruja region, and had close relations with the other two, Rranza and Kurbini.

Travel Impressions

Johann Georg von Hahn, who visited the Benda region in August 1863, reported on it as follows:

We left Tirana on the main road leading in an easterly direction to Matja. It passes through the southernmost of the five gaps in the Kruja mountains, which is named after the village of Skala of Dunja that is located at the western entrance thereof, three hours east of Tirana. [. . .] On the top of the ridge near the entrance to the Skala of Dunja is the village of Wendscha [Vença?]. The natives claim that it was once a town and the see of a bishop. And indeed, among the dioceses of Albania, Farlatti includes one called Benda, though without stating where it was located. The whole region is now inhabited by Muslims only. They make up 400 households in all, that are scattered about in Albanian fashion, either as individual farmhouses or as loosely settled hamlets that all fall under one name. For instance, the southern part of the eastern slope across from Vença is called Bastari and consists of 200 houses. If my informant counted them properly, it can be divided into 13 different hamlets.

After taking a first look at this valley, I decided to change my travel plans and spend the night in Vença to gather information about this new region. The people of Vença were, however, not in agreement with this, and no one was willing to take us in. They said they had neither barley nor stables for the horses, and one could not leave the animals outdoors for fear of wolves. Our guide from Mat invoked the Prophet to denounce their lack of hospitality and used such injurious terms that even these sluggish villagers reacted to them, and I had to intervene to prevent a brawl. Finally, the chief of the village, a young man with a pockmarked nose who was dressed in gold-embroidered clothes, whom I had summoned, gave way and opened his house to us, after swiftly removing the women. In all of my travels, this was the only time that I ever had difficulty obtaining accommodation for the night. But even when this was achieved, the people of Vença were not what one would exactly call amicable. If they had had the courage, I believe that they would have entirely hindered me from inspecting their valley. The grumbling I heard from the men around me did not sound encouraging, but no one dared to leave any of my questions unanswered. Of course, I directed my questions to those who seemed the most upset by my presence. The longer we talked, however, the more peaceful and courteous they became. By the time it got dark, we had established good relations, and I bid them farewell.⁵

CHAPTER 8

THE TRIBES OF THE MIRDITA REGION

The Composite Mirdita Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Mirdita tribal region (formerly also Merdita) is situated in the District of Mirdita in northern central Albania. It is a comparatively large region and corresponds broadly to the current District of Mirdita and the basin of the Greater and Lesser Fan Rivers. Indeed, in terms of population and geographical expanse it was the largest of all the tribal regions in Albania, being actually a composition of a number of tribes (Dibri, Kushneni, Spaçi, Fani, Oroshi, etc.).

Mirdita borders on the traditional tribal regions of Puka (Qerreti, Kabashi, Berisha, etc.) to the north; on the tribes of the Lezha highlands (Bulgëri, Kryezezi, Manatia, Vela) to the west and southwest; on the coastal plain of northern Albania around Zadrime and Lezha, from the Drin River to the Mat River, to the west; on the Mat River and the District of Mat to the south; and on the region of the Black Drin River to the east.

The main settlement of Mirdita is now Rrëshen, which is currently its administrative centre. Among other settlements are Rubik and a great number of long-established small villages such as Orosh, Spaç, Kurbnesh, Kaçinar, Blinisht, Perlat and Kalivaç.

Population

The term Mirdita occurs as *Mirdita* in an Ottoman document in 1571;¹ as *Miriditti* as the tribal name in a report by Marino Bizzi in 1610; as



Figure 8.1 The tribal leaders of Mirdita

Meredita in a letter from the Albanian bishop of Sappa and Sarda, Pjetër Budi, in 1621; as *Mireditta* in an ecclesiastical report by Pietro Maserecco in 1634; as *Miriditi* in an ecclesiastical report by the bishop of Lezha, Benedetto Orsini Ragusino, in 1642; as *Miriditi* in an ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari in 1671; as *Mirediti* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola; and as *Meredita(i)* in a report of the Catholic archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich, in 1703. The region was earlier also known as Ndërfandina, i.e. 'land between the (Greater and Lesser) Fan Rivers'.

Etymologically, the word Mirdita is derived from the nebulous ancestral father of the tribe, Mir Diti. Less likely is a relationship to Arabic *marid*, *marada* 'rebel' that is said to have entered Albanian from Byzantine Greek. Totally implausible is the folk etymology linking the term to the Albanian *mirëdita* 'hello, good-day'.²

Mirdita is a wholly Catholic tribe and in the nineteenth century was regarded as fanatically Catholic. The French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard, who visited it in the 1850s, records the following:



Figure 8.2 Two tribesmen in fine Mirdita costumes



Figure 8.3 Gjon Markagjoni (1888–1966), *kapedan* of Mirdita

The Mirdita men all profess to be Catholics and no Muslims are allowed to settle in their mountains where they exercise their faith. There are no examples of anyone in Mirdita forswearing his religion and anyone who tried to do so would most certainly be put to death if he did not flee from Albania. The men of Mirdita, who understand only the ceremonial practices of our faith and have no idea of its moral teachings, are not wont to pardon insults and are



Figure 8.4 Two Mirdita women carrying cradle and supplies

excessively fanatic. They strictly observe all fasts and abstinence and look upon those who do not as infidels. No insult to their religion has ever gone unpunished. The Muslims of the surrounding regions learned this lesson well when their mosques were defiled one time after a Muslim fired a shot at a cross or damaged a Catholic building. When the pasha recently banned the construction of a seminary and removed what had already been built, the men of

Mirdita resolved to descend to the plain and tear down a mosque in order to avenge the outrage done to Catholicism.³

The French diplomat Emile Wiet travelled through the diocese of Lezha and Mirdita in the 1860s and lamented the state of religious education and indeed of any education in Mirdita:

Of the 17,279 Catholics in the diocese, only about fifty know how to read, and only just ten know how to sign their names. Education has been severely neglected. That is, there are neither schools nor persons willing to teach young people about the obligations of the Catholic Church and society. If one compares this state of ignorance to that of the Orthodox in the other provinces of the Empire, one is not surprised to see that the latter, in general, have managed to rise above their original state and attain a certain level of prosperity. Up to the age of eleven, young people attend schools that even the poorest Greek villages in the Pindus Mountains maintain, financed by the communities in question. The Muslims of the Diocese of Lezha send their children to the hodja or to a simple muezzin serving the mosque, who teaches them to read and instructs them in their religion.⁴

In his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains' in 1841, Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gives the population of Mirdita as 20,000, of whom 5,000 were men in arms.⁵

The Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz, who hiked through the region in August 1903, noted the following population figures:

Mirdita is the most reputable and powerful of the tribes of northern Albania. It is all Catholic and can be divided into the following five *bajraks* with a total of 1,900 families: Dibrri (600 families), Kushneni (110 families), Oroshi (120 families), Spaçi (650 families) and Fani (420 families).⁶

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Mirdita tribe were given as follows: 2,376 households with a total of 16,926 inhabitants.

This comprised the *bajraks* of Dibri, Fani, Kushneni, Oroshi and Spaçi, and the settlements and surroundings of: Fregna, Gryka e Gjadrit, Kaçinar, Kalivaç, Kalor, Kashnjet, Kashnjet-Kaftalli, Korthpula, Korthpula-Kaftalli, Mnela, Rras, Sukaxhia, Tejkodra, Ungrej, Vig, Vrith, Bisak, Domgjon, Konaj, Sërriqja, Shëngjin, Xhuxha, Blinisht, Kushnen, Ndërfana, Orosh, Breg, Doç, Gjegan, Gojan, Gomsiqja, Kalivarja, Kimza, Kisha e Arstit, Lumbardhë, Mesul, Qafa e Malit, Shkoza, Spaç and Tuç. Mirdita was thus by far the largest of the tribes of the north, matched only by Luma.⁷

The Mirdita tribe consisted traditionally of three *bajraks*: Kushneni, Spaçi and Oroshi that traced their origin from the legendary brother of Shala and Shoshi. Being consanguineous, these three *bajraks* did not intermarry, nor did they intermarry with Shala or Shoshi. They were then joined by two other *bajraks*, Fani and Dibri, that could intermarry with the former three.⁸ These five *bajraks*, Dibri, Kushneni, Spaçi, Fani and Oroshi, thus joined forces to form the Mirdita tribe. It had a common flag showing a white hand on a red background, with the five fingers of the hand representing the five *bajraks*.

In 1818, three *bajraks* of Little Ohrid [Ohri i Vogël], being Kthella, Selita and Bushkashi, seceded from the Mat region to the south of Mirdita, and joined Mirdita, which then had eight *bajraks*. The four *bajraks* of the Lezha highlands also joined Mirdita that year, giving the tribe a total of 12 *bajraks*: Dibri, Fani, Kushneni, Oroshi, Spaçi, Selita, Kthella, Rranza, Kryezezi, Bulgëri, Manatia and Vela.

The English traveller, Henry Tozer (1829–1916), who visited the Mirdita region in 1865, described governance there in the following terms:

They have the reputation of being the fiercest and most warlike of all the Albanians, and have never been subdued by the Turks, of whom they are absolutely independent, being governed by a Prince of their own, who is a descendant of Scanderbeg. They are the hereditary enemies of the Montenegrins; and it was strange to think that within so short a distance we should visit two Christian peoples so strongly contrasted with one another, differing in race, political organization, and even religion, for the Mirdites are all Roman Catholics.

The constitution of the Mirdita is a sort of military aristocracy; for though there is a hereditary chief, and an assembly, in which the whole people is represented, yet the power is really vested in

the heads of the chief families. All the relatives of the Prince have the title of Captain, and command the divisions of the army under him in time of war; but they have no direct political influence in the country. Each district has its *bayrakdar*, or standard bearer, under whom are the senators. These are the heads of their respective clans, so that the office is hereditary, and a child may be a senator, only in that case his functions are administered by his guardian until he is of age. No measures can be taken without the consent of the *bayrakdars* and senators; and when matters of the greatest importance have to be discussed, a council of the whole nation is called – that is to say, a representative is sent from each family; but these have practically no influence in the deliberations, and are only summoned in order to give weight to the general decision. When called together by the Prince, this senate meets at Orosch; but they have also the power of meeting on their own account, in which case their *rendez-vous* is a church of St. Paul in another part of the country, which belongs to no parish, but serves for an independent central point for the whole Mirdita. Only two days before our visit one of these parliaments had been held at the palace; on which occasion three oxen and several sheep and goats had been killed, and great feasting had taken place at Bib Doda's expense. This kind of hospitality is always expected of the chief; and when he is at Scodra, he keeps open house for any of his tribe who come there, and a sheep is killed every day for the entertainment of the lower classes.⁹

The German geographer, Kurt Hassert, making his way through the mountains of northern Albania in the summer of 1897, also noted the autonomy of Mirdita:

We crossed Albania's largest river, the Drin, on a primitive ferry that consisted of two dugouts attached by crossbeams. Here on the left bank began Mirdita land. The Catholic Mirdita are the most populous tribe of the highlands and have managed to wrest a whole series of privileges from the Sublime Porte. They live in complete autonomy and, like the other independent mountain tribes, will not suffer the presence of any Turks on their land. Only in wartime are they obliged to provide troops, although Christians in Turkey are otherwise exempt from military service. Indeed, they

enjoy the dubious honour of fighting on the right wing of Turkish forces, whereas the Hoti tribe, also Catholic, has the same privilege for the left wing.¹⁰

Compared to the other tribes, the Mirdita had a better developed military organisation, which they used to defend themselves from Turkish and other incursions, but also for raiding and pillaging. Hyacinthe Hecquard remarked that they were the greatest looters in the world.¹¹

Another writer, Baron Alexandre Degrand, who served as French consul in Shkodra from 1893 to 1899, noted:

An irresistible fondness for vengeance, inflexible religious fanaticism, and fidelity in general to the promises they make – such are the distinctive character traits of the Mirdita and, indeed, of the other mountain inhabitants of High Albania. However, I must confess that the Mirdita have a particularly sad reputation, and it is well deserved. They are notorious as looters and pilferers, which they incontestably are, but they are made out to be worse than is the case. Among them are some very poor people, in particular those who live at the foot of the mountains, and from time to time they succumb to temptation and steal a few animals from their rich, fat neighbours on the fertile plains of Zadrima. Such thefts occur frequently in the summer because they use up all of their provisions in the winter and harvest time is not yet at hand. These ravages also take place before major religious feasts which they are in the habit of celebrating. Perhaps they believe that the patron saint they are honouring will intercede to mitigate the consequences of their base deeds. Alas, there are many feast days and many saints. The owners of the coveted animals strive to defend their property and this almost always results in deaths.¹²

A decade later, Edith Durham described them as follows:

On a point of honour Mirdita can and has shed blood in torrents. The Mirdites are famed of old as cattle-lifters, going a-raiding joyfully, as did the clans on the English border, and successfully capturing a hundred head at a time from the plains – of which they were the terror – and even from far Moslem tribes.¹³

Karl Steinmetz noted similarly on his journey through Mirdita in August 1905:

The men of Mirdita, whose infertile soil can barely feed them, steal down to the fertile plain of Zadrima at night to rustle livestock. There had been a lot of raids recently, many of which were accompanied by bloody skirmishes. The inhabitants of the plains were so bitter about this that they shot and killed anyone from Mirdita who ventured down to the lowlands. One of the best known chieftains of Mirdita was shot on his way to Shkodra. A cry of vengeance then rose throughout Mirdita.¹⁴

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The legendary ancestral father of the Mirdita tribe was called Mir Diti, son of Dit Murri and grandson of Murr Deti also known as Murr Dedi. His brother, Zog Diti, was the ancestral father of the closely related Shoshi tribe, and his other brother, Mark Diti, was the ancestral father of the Shala tribe.

The sons of Mir Diti, who formed the core of the Oroshi, Spaçi and Kushneni tribes in the sixteenth century, were: Bushi, Lluli (Luli), Skanda (Skana) and Qyqa.¹⁵

As it was a federation of *bajraks* of different sources, the Mirdita tribe as a whole was of polyphyletic origin. It was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor, although some of its *bajraks*, such as Oroshi, Spaçi and Kushneni, did trace their origins back.

From their oral history, it seems that the Mirdita, together with the ancestors of the Shala and Shoshi tribes, stemmed originally from the region of Mount Pashtrik on the border between Albania and Kosovo, near Prizren. They seem to have lived there under a Bulgarian chief, and there is ample evidence of Orthodox influence in the early history of the later so-Catholic Mirdita tribe. It is then said that the arrival of the Turks pushed these tribes westwards into the mountains. Around 1450, at the time of Scanderbeg and when the Turks had taken Shkodra, the Mirdita fled back to their original homeland at the foot of Mount Pashtrik and only returned to their present position around 1750.¹⁶

The Russian scholar, Julija Vladimirovna Ivanova, who conducted field research in northern Albania in 1956 and 1958, gathered very

similar information. She noted that at the end of the fourteenth century, there were population movements in the Pashtrik mountain region. Part of the population moved down onto the northern part of the Dukagjin Plateau (Metohija). Another group, including the family of Murr Deti, moved into the mountains of Puka, on the left (south) side of the Drin River. This region is also known as Old Dukagjin (*Dukagjini i Vjetër*). A new migration occurred from here in the fifteenth or seventeenth centuries, whereby part of this population move over the Lok Pass (Qafa e Lokut) and settled in what is now known as Mirdita. Another part of the population (i.e. the Shala) moved to the southeast banks of Lake Shkodra and, from there, farther northwards up into the Shala Valley, where they encountered an old native population called Mavriq.¹⁷

Early historical information about the Mirdita tribe points to them living in the mountains north of Blinisht, in what were subsequently the *bajraks* of Spaçi and Kushneni. The chieftains of the Mirdita tribe lived in Blinisht itself, which was long also the venue of their tribal assemblies.

The Mirdita regard themselves as stemming from Pal Dukagjini, said to be a brother of the somewhat better known Lekë Dukagjini (1410–81). It has been suggested that at this early period, the Mirdita tribe was known simply as the Dukagjini tribe. Pal Dukagjini was the father of Kol Pali and the grandfather of a certain Mark, who had a son in Pashtrik called Gjon Marku.

According to further information gathered by Ivanova, the core of the Mirdita tribe stemmed from three old families. One was that of a certain Bushi, the son of the above-mentioned Mir Diti. The second family were the Lluli. Their ancestral father, Lluli, was the son of the above-mentioned Pal Dukagjini. The third family were known as the Skana who were either native to the region or arrived from Kruja in the fifteenth century.¹⁸ It was from the second family, the Lluli, that the subsequent ruling Gjemarkaj family is said to have stemmed.

The Gjemarkaj Family

The recorded history of the Mirdita tribe begins in the mid-eighteenth century and is closely linked to the said Gjemarkaj (or Gjonmarkaj) family, a leading, and later 'princely' clan that held a position of influence in Mirdita right up to the mid-twentieth century.

The first historical figure of this dynasty was a Gjon Marku, who is thought to have lived around 1720. He was the first to bear the

traditional title of *kapedan* ('captain', though later often translated as 'prince'). A descendant of the same name fought with Hysejn Bey and Tahir Bey of Lezha against Mehmed Pasha Bushatlliu (d. 1775) in 1769. He arrived 'with many men from Mirdita and other villages'¹⁹ to keep Mehmed Pasha out of the Zadrime area, although unsuccessfully. In the following year, we find him in the service of Mehmed Pasha when he helped the pasha take Lezha. On Mehmed Pasha's behalf, Gjon Marku also fought against Ahmet Kurt Pasha of Berat (d. 1787) and died at the battle of Peqin in September 1775.²⁰

The Mirdita tribe and the Gjomarkaj family remained vassals of the powerful Bushatlliu dynasty under Mehmed Pasha's second son and successor, Kara Mahmud Pasha Bushatlliu (1749–96), who reigned over much of northern and central Albania for about 20 years. Gjon Marku supported this pasha in particular on 25 November 1787 when the men of Mirdita helped put to flight Turkish forces that had been besieging the fortress of Shkodra since August of that year under Çerkez Hasan Pasha.

Under their next leader, Kol Gjomarkaj (d. 1806), the Mirdita tribe supported the next pasha of Shkodra, Ibrahim Pasha Bushatlliu (d. 1809), in a campaign to put down Serb rebels. During this campaign, however, Ibrahim Pasha executed the Mirdita leader for reasons that have remained unclear. This execution led, of course, to a sudden rupture in relations between Mirdita and the Bushatlliu dynasty.²¹

In 1810, under their new *kapedan* Prenk Lleshi (d. post 1815),²² the Mirdita tribe invaded the fertile Zadrime area south of Shkodra and destroyed all the Muslim settlements there. Zadrime was also to become the favourite region for Mirdita marauding and pillaging in the following seven years, and thereafter. Aware of Mirdita's growing power, Ali Pasha of Tepelena (1744–1822), the great southern Albanian rival of the northern Albanian Bushatlliu dynasty, endeavoured to win them over by sending lavish presents to Prenk Lleshi and other leaders and by doubling the salary of the 500 Mirdita fighters in his service.²³ It was only in 1815 that Mirdita made peace with the Mustafa Pasha Bushatlliu (1796–1860). On this occasion, Mustafa Pasha confirmed:

We, Highness and Vizier Mustafa Pasha of Shkodra and Albania
[...] have always recognised the house of Gjon Marku and held

it in high esteem as the first in all of Mirdita [...] this was recognised by all of my ancestors, my uncle viziers of our divan [...] ²⁴

Prenk Lleshi fell several years later in a battle against the Turks that was waged at Sappa, probably near Nënshat. He was succeeded by his son, Prenk Doda, who initially allied himself with Ali Pasha of Tepelena and, after the latter's death, set off with Mustafa Pasha Bushatlliu on a military expedition to the Morea to put down the rebellion in Greece. The great Suliot Albanian fighter of the Greek war of independence, Marko Boçari (1790–1823), known in Greek as Markos Botzaris, is said to have been killed below Prenk Doda's tent. On his return home, Prenk Doda suppressed a revolt in Dibra on behalf of Mustafa Pasha. He was then apparently poisoned by a Turkish woman in Shkodra and died in Kotor where he had hoped to recover. ²⁵

Prenk Doda, whose body is said to lie in a simple grave at the Catholic cemetery in Kotor, was succeeded by his young brother, Nikola or Kol Doda. As Nikola was not of age at the time, Mirdita was taken over by his uncle Black Llesh or Black Alexander (d. post 1831), known as Lleshi i zi in Albanian. According to the Hyacinthe Hecquard, Black Llesh was known both for his bravery and for his cruelty. He fought with the Turks against the rebel Greeks, but in 1830, he then threw his support behind Mustafa Pasha Bushatlliu who had risen against the Porte. Together with Mustafa Pasha, he resisted the Turkish siege of the fortress of Shkodra until the fortress fell in November 1831 and he was exiled to Janina. Black Llesh was then replaced as *kapedan* of Mirdita by his nephew Nikola who took part in Turkish expeditions against Montenegro. Through his military prowess, Nikola won the admiration and support of the Grand Vizier, Reshid Pasha, who gave him command of a wing of the Turkish vanguard in a battle in Konya against Mehmet Ali (1769–1849) of Egypt. While he was away, the three sons of Black Llesh attempted to overthrow him back home in Mirdita. When Nikola heard of the plot, he had his rivals murdered, which then led to a chain reaction of Albanian blood-feuding. Black Llesh, who had been pardoned by the Turks, returned to Mirdita and murdered Nikola. Less than a year later, Nikola's wife, in turn, slew Black Llesh one night. As there were no more male heirs in the family of Black Llesh, this time it was his wife who took revenge and murdered Gjok Doda, the son of Prenk Doda.

After this, a truce was arranged and peace was gradually restored when the surviving members of the dynasty agreed that enough blood had been spilled and an equal number of deaths had been caused on both sides.²⁶

In the early 1840s, Bibë Doda, later known as Bibë Dodë Pasha (d. 1867), son of the murdered Gjok Doda, took over as *kapedan* of Mirdita. In 1844, he assisted Mehmed Reshid Pasha in putting down rebels in southern Albania and was given an Ottoman medal for his efforts. At the same time, however, he was in contact with Montenegro and Serbia, in particular with the Serbian minister of the interior, Ilija Garašanin (1812–74), whose noted political treatise *Načertanije* ('Draft') called for Serbian expansion into Albanian territory as a means of acquiring an outlet to the sea. Around 1846, Serbian diplomats secretly offered Bibë Doda rule over an independent Mirdita in exchange for his support for Serbian rule of Shkodra and Ulqin/Ulcinj. Soon thereafter, in 1849, Bibë Doda was made a pasha and in 1852 he had the men of Mirdita take part in a Turkish campaign against Montenegro. During the Crimean War (1853–6), a contingent of Mirdita fighters also fought with the Turkish army on the Danube. In 1862, however, Mirdita forces refused to support the Turkish army in another attack on Montenegro, this time to put down a revolt in Herzegovina. They had been dissuaded from doing so by two Catholic clergymen, Pal Dodmasej (Ital. Paolo Dodmassei, 1814–68), who was the Bishop of Pulat (1847–58) and later Bishop of Lezha (1858–68), and Gasper Krasniqi (Ital. Gaspero Crasnich, d. 1876), who was the Abbot of Saint Alexander in Orosh (ca. 1860–75). Both of these men were to play prominent roles in the history of Mirdita. Then, and in following years, the Gjomarkaj family was often at odds, at times indeed was in an open power struggle, with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, represented in particular by Krasniqi.

The capital of Mirdita in the nineteenth century was the mountain village of Orosh, which was both the home of the Gjomarkaj family and the seat of the famed Abbey of Saint Alexander (Shën Llesh). People from as far as Dubrovnik used to come to Orosh on pilgrimages. According to the *Orbis Seraphicus* in 1688:

The abbey is famous in the region and many great Albanian and Serbian families have enriched it with precious gifts. The remains of Saint Alexander, a Roman soldier who was

decapitated under Maximian, are preserved there, as is a piece of the True Cross. The latter is enclosed in a silver shrine left to the care of the priest. All the other riches have been lost with the exception of a casket encrusted in gold, a silver cross and two chalices. The rest was stolen by the Turks or by wicked Christians, or disappeared over the course of time.²⁷

It was custom in Orosh in the nineteenth century, before the animals were driven up to their summer pastures in the mountains, to have them blessed by the abbot of the church with the relics of Saint Alexander. The head of the saint in a silver reliquary with a Greek inscription on it actually disappeared in 1765 and was replaced by a reliquary allegedly containing the bones of Saint Benedict, which the Bishop of Lezha brought from Rome. Nonetheless, popular tradition in Mirdita had it that the reliquary was that of Saint Alexander. The reliquary in question and two fifteenth-century processional crosses were preserved at the abbey in Orosh in a jewelled casket until 1895 when they were destroyed by fire. The feast of Saint Alexander was observed throughout Mirdita on 13 May, though the men of Mirdita still preferred to swear their oaths by Saint Benedict (*për atë Sh'Venedik!*).

The abbots of Orosh were appointed by the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in Rome. Throughout the nineteenth century, the *kapedans* of the Gjomarkaj family endeavoured to exert their influence on the appointments. Pjetër Gurakuqi (Ital. Pietro Guracuchi) of Shkodra, a favourite of Prenk Lleshi, was appointed as abbot in 1810, as were Pjetër Zarishi (Ital. Pietro Zarisci, 1806–66) in 1847, Gasper Krasniqi in 1860, and Preng Doçi (Ital. Primus Docci, 1846–1917) in 1889. It was under Krasniqi that the abbey began to play a major political role in Mirdita. Krasniqi, who favoured an alliance with Montenegro and Serbia as the best means of overthrowing Ottoman rule in Albania, had facilitated contacts between Bibë Doda and the Serbian government in 1846. He corresponded with Garašanin (in Latin) and visited him in Belgrade in the spring of 1849.²⁸

In general, Bibë Doda found it wiser to collaborate with the Turks than to rise against them with the Montenegrins. An open conflict broke out between Krasniqi and Bibë Doda in 1862 when the former sabotaged the latter's plan of assisting the Turkish army in attacking Montenegro, as mentioned above. The conflict came to a head and Gasper

Krasniqi was exiled in June of that year, but managed nonetheless to do much damage to Bibë Doda's reputation with the Porte. The Mirdita chieftain was accordingly stripped of his *kapedan* and pasha titles in February 1863. Realising that his position in Mirdita was severely compromised, Bibë Doda hastened to Constantinople and managed to convince the Porte of his innocence of any anti-Ottoman conspiracy. He returned to Albania in July 1864, but the tribal leaders of Mirdita now refused to recognise him as *kapedan* because he had not paid the wages of their fighters, including money for their participation in the Crimean War. Bibë Doda died of dropsy in August 1868.²⁹

Bibë Doda was succeeded by his son, Prenk Bibë Doda (1858–1919), who was ten years old at the time. In 1869, shortly after his father's death, the boy was taken as a hostage to Constantinople, where he was educated and spent his adolescent years. In 1876, he returned to his native Mirdita region and officially inherited the hereditary title of *kapedan* of Mirdita. Immediately after accession, on the suggestion of some Russian diplomats he had met in Constantinople, he made contact with Montenegro and, when unrest broke out in Mirdita due to an Ottoman military recruitment campaign, he supported an uprising and took over as its leader. Not having received the Montenegrin support he had been counting on, however, the revolt flagged by the end of December 1867 and its only noted success was that the fighters of Mirdita took control of the Shkodra–Prizren road for a time. The uprising collapsed entirely when Doda tactically withdrew his support. In this period, and later, Prenk Bibë Doda was primarily interested in the creation of an autonomous Catholic principality in Mirdita and northern Albania over which he would reign himself.

Prenk Bibë Doda played an important role in Mirdita at the time of the League of Prizren. On 3 April 1880, he was made deputy head of a so-called Defence League (*Lidhja Mbrojtëse*) in Shkodra to oppose the internationally sanctioned annexation of Albanian territory by Montenegro. However, he soon abandoned the defence of the Tuz (Tuzi) area and withdrew with his forces to Mirdita. In October and November 1880, he indeed showed himself to be accommodating to the Montenegrin takeover of the Albanian port of Ulqin/Ulcinj.

The Ottoman authorities increasingly suspected that Doda was becoming a supporter of Albanian independence and had him exiled in 1881. 'Meeting him one day, at dinner, at the Austrian Consulate,

Dervish Pasha invited him to inspect a Turkish war vessel, then off Medua. Contrary, it is said, to the advice of his friends, the young Prince went. The vessel at once got up steam, and the little pleasure trip became a twenty-eight years' exile, passed, for many years in Kastamuni, in Asia Minor'.³⁰

The exile of Prenk Bibë Doda left Mirdita without a leader and plunged the whole region into anarchy and turmoil. The years of chaos took their toll on the population of the tribe, and poverty reigned, much worse than elsewhere in the country. The British barrister and journalist Edward Knight (1852–1925) who travelled through Albania in 1878 described the Mirdita tribe thus:

Some tribes, like the Mirdites, are in a wretched condition, starving in their mountains, the result of a long protracted war with the government, originating probably in some petty dispute with a tax collector. These wars hang on in a desultory way for years, until the wretched highlanders, in order to support existence, are obliged to become bandits and cattle-lifters – outlaws – the enemies of all men. A Mirdite is now a wretched object generally. I have seen them crawl through the narrow alleys of the bazaar of Scutari, ragged, scowling at every one, haggard and weak with hunger, their arms sold for bread – the sign of extreme poverty, for it is a bitter thing for an Arnaut to part with his beloved weapons, heirlooms as a rule. The ramrod of his lost pistol alone dangles from his belt. This, curiously enough, no man ever seems to part with – probably because it is unsalable.³¹

In 1908, after the Young Turk revolution, the 50-year-old Prenk Bibë Doda was finally allowed to return to Albania. Edith Durham, who heard of his arrival while she was travelling through the mountains, hastened to meet the fabled prince. She described the event as follows:

The impossible had happened; the Prince had returned to his people. He dismounted with the air of one that knows not if he be asleep or awake. It is hard to be called on suddenly to play the part of a demi-god.

We thronged into the wood, where, under a great tree, was spread a carpet. He took his seat upon a chair, his crimson fez

making a brilliant blot on the greenleaf background. Then all his male relatives – many born since he was exiled – were presented to him. I thought of the Forest of Arden, where they ‘fleeted the time pleasantly as in the Golden Age’ – as each in turn strode up, ‘an hero beauteous among all the throng’ dropped on one knee, and did homage, kissing his chieftain’s hand with simple dignity. The tribesmen stood around in a great circle, the sunflecks dancing on their white clothes, and glinting on gunbarrel and cartridge-belt.

There came a pause. Nature, exhausted by emotion, needed food; moreover, it was midday. I shared a cold sheep’s liver with the two Young Turks, who, though it was Ramazan, made each a hearty lunch, as was noted by the tribesmen with contempt, for a Mirdite holds that to break a fast is the one unpardonable sin. The red wine flowed, and the cold mutton was hurled about in lumps. A few minutes emptied the bottles and bared the bones.

We awaited the coming of the Abbate. Mirdita without the Abbate is ‘Hamlet’ without the central figure. Nor had we long to wait. His gold-banded cap shone over the heads of the crowd, that parted and let him through on his fat white horse, gay with a gold saddlecloth, followed by the rest of the priests of Mirdita.

We went out on to the bare hillside. There was no room among the trees for the great concourse now assembled. The men of the five bariaks – Oroshi, Fandi, Spachi, Kusneni, and Dibri – and the neighbour tribe of Kthela squatted or knelt in a huge and dense circle.

It struck me suddenly that among some two thousand five hundred armed men I was the solitary petticoat. The Young Turks and I were the only anachronisms – blots on the old-world picture. The Abbate stepped into the middle, and spoke with a great voice that rang over the land. His words were weighty – ‘The Constitution was the will of the Sultan. Mirdita would remain loyal to him – but would retain, as before, her privileges, and be self-governed according to the Canon of Lek Dukaghin – from this day forth those laws would be truly enforced. Blood-vengeance was to cease. Peace was to be sworn until Ash Wednesday, 1909, by which time all bloods were to be pacified; and hereafter any man that kills another shall be banished, not

only from Mirdita, but from all Albania. Robbery between the tribes was to be stopped, and the law enforced (for one thing stolen two should be returned), even were it necessary to summon three battalions from Scutari to help to enforce it.

Prenk Pasha briefly confirmed the Abbate's speech; Kapetan Marko stepped forward and emptied his revolver over us; the circling crowd fired in return, and broke up at once into the five bariaks, which withdrew – each with its priests – to discuss the momentous announcement.

It was a very momentous announcement. I could only admire the skill and policy of the Abbate, who, after working for fifteen long years with all the means in his power to cleanse the land of the curse of blood in vain, had seized this supreme moment in the tribes' existence – the return of the man whom they were born to obey – to make a bold effort to crown his labour and wipe out the custom finally and for ever. If he succeeded, this day was the end of the old life, its sins and sorrows.

The Mirdites are a silent people. The meetings of other tribes are a continuous roar, as each shouts the other down. But there was no clamour from the five groups that discussed in earnest undertones the question of 'to be or not to be.' How was a man to keep his honour clean if he might not shoot? vexed many an honest soul. It is better to die, said they, than to live dishonoured. It seemed doubtful, very doubtful, if the tribe, as a whole, would accept the terms that had taken but a few moments to explain. Finally, hereditary loyalty to the Chief triumphed over private passions—each priest came forward and announced that his flock was agreed. Peace was proclaimed till Ash Wednesday, 1909, and by then ways and means were to be determined.

The five bariaks spread again in a great circle. The Abbate had triumphed. He stood erect in the centre, ordering with uplifted arm the final volleys, as the Pasha rode round acclaimed by all.

The great meeting was over, the white groups melted away, like snow on the mountains. The Pasha, the Abbate, and all the chief actors in the scene filed in long procession down to the valley of the Fani i vogel, on their way to the Abbate's Palace at Oroshi. Soon none were left on the historic spot, but the dead asleep in the lonely graveyard. A chill wind arose, and the autumn leaves fell in showers.

For better or for worse, a page had been turned in Albania's history. The summer had gone, the year was dying. I had seen the Land of the Living Past.³²

Prenk Bibë Doda hoped to accede to the new throne of Albania after independence in 1912, but nonetheless showed his solidarity with the government created in Vlora under Ismail Qemal bey Vlora (1844–1919). He also had good contacts with Serbian forces that had occupied much of northern Albania. The Great Powers, however, decided on a German prince to rule the new Albanian state. Doda remained loyal to Prince Wilhelm zu Wied (1876–1945) in the spring of 1914, whom he supported militarily and under whom he served for a short time (28 May–22 June 1914) as foreign minister. From 1 January 1919, he also served as deputy prime minister in the government of Turhan Pasha Përmeti (1839–1927). On 22 March of that year, however, as he was travelling from Durrës to Shëngjin with British consul Morton Eden (1865–1948), Prenk Bibë Doda was assassinated in the marshes of Bregu i Matës near Lezha by his rival Ded Coku, who took belated revenge for the murder of his brother Gjeta Coku on 7 October 1913.

With the death of Prenk Bibë Doda, who had no male heirs, the Gjemarkaj lineage passed on to a cousin or nephew called Marka Gjoni (1861–1932). Marka Gjoni's initial attempt to claim the title of *kapedan* was fraught with difficulties because many of the leaders of Mirdita refused to recognise him. He was never a popular figure. Edith Durham reports that he displayed such cowardice in 1914 when he fled from the front and said he had come 'to fetch vaseline to clean the rifles' that he lost all chance of chieftainship.³³ In 1921, with financial backing from Belgrade, Marka Gjoni rebelled against the new 'Muslim' government of Albania and proclaimed Mirdita independent. This so-called Republic of Mirdita, called to life in Prizren on 17 July 1921, supported by Serbia and recognised by Greece, was put down swiftly by Albanian government forces and ceased to exist on 20 November 1921. Marka Gjoni was forced to flee to Yugoslavia, though he later returned to Albania and was active in Mirdita for a few years until his death.

The next titular *kapedan* of the Mirdita region was Marka Gjoni's son, Gjon Markagjoni (1888–1966), who was born in Orosh. With this father, he had been a main protagonist in the secession of Mirdita in July 1921 and fled to Serbia with him and his son when it was suppressed.

In 1922, however, Gjon Markagjoni returned to Albania and, after reaching an understanding with Ahmet Zogu (1895–1961), who was minister of the interior and of defence and then prime minister, he was made a lieutenant colonel under Zogu. In 1926, Markagjoni headed a commission to arbitrate blood feuds that were still widespread in Mirdita and the northern Albanian mountains, and finally in 1927 he succeeded his father as the hereditary *kapedan*. In April 1939, having rebelled against King Zog and allied himself with fascist Italy, he is said to have signed a petition calling for Italian military intervention to do away with the ‘disorder, corruption and dissolution of the Zogist regime’. During the Italian occupation, he was courted by Rome, given the position of an Italian senator on 3 June 1939 and was offered a lavish reception by Mussolini. From December 1941 to January 1943 he was a member of the Supreme Fascist Corporative Council (parliament). He was also Albanian minister of the interior in the short-lived cabinet of Maliq bey Bushati (1880–1946) from 12 February to 28 April 1943 and collaborated with the German occupation authorities in 1943–4. In late 1944, he fled to Italy and was given asylum by the Vatican. In September 1949, Gjon Markagjoni agreed to join the anticommunist National Committee for a Free Albania, though he was not particularly politically active in the postwar period. He died in Rome.

Mark Ded Gjomarkaj (1912–46), the son of Gjon Markagjoni, was the next titular *kapedan* of Mirdita. He had fled to Yugoslavia as a boy with his father in 1921, and returned to Albania with him. Mark Gjomarkaj attended the Jesuit Saverian College in Shkodra and studied in Rome, where he finished a doctorate in law. In 1943 he was involved in the nationalist movement, the main aim of which was to prevent the southern Albanian communists from taking power. In the autumn of 1944, his fighters in Mirdita were finally overcome by communist partisans and he fled with Muharrem Bajraktari (1896–1989) to Luma. It was at this time of turmoil that he inherited the title *kapedan* from his father who had taken refuge in Rome. Anticommunist resistance and fighting continued in the northern mountains into the early months of 1946 when Mark Gjomarkaj and his armed band were liquidated. In June of that year he was murdered in his sleep in Prosek, near Kthella, by his brother-in-law who hoped thereby to buy reprieve from the communists. Mark’s brother Skënder

then took bloody revenge for the deed and extinguished the brother-in-law's whole family, i.e. the brother-in-law himself, his own sister and their children.³⁴

Mark Gjomarkaj's son, Gjon Markagjoni (1938–2003), grew up and lived his life in internment under the communist regime, together with the other surviving members of the Gjomarkaj dynasty. The title of *kapedan* or Prince of Mirdita was now but a memory of the past.

Travel Impressions

The English traveller Henry Tozer left the following impressions after his visit to Mirdita in 1865:

We were now within the territory of the Mirdites, and the wildness of the scenery harmonized well with all that we had heard of the character of the natives. Here and there, however, gentle nooks appeared, where bright green poplars, with patches of maize and small vineyards, gave an aspect of cultivation; and the cows coming up from the water, and the sheep following the shepherd, as in the parable, suggested thoughts of rural life, though these were somewhat marred by the long gun which the shepherd carried on his shoulder. At one point, where the river makes a considerable bend, an armed party suddenly appeared from behind a mass of rock which projected above the valley, and, after hailing us, enquired where we were going. Our guide was not with us, having made a detour into the mountains to avoid wading the stream, but Nicola satisfied them by shouting that we were on our way to visit the Prince. [...]

On waking the next morning we found at our heads a large cross carved on the bark of the tree, a sure sign that we were among Christians. Around us was a pretty glade, surrounded by oak brushwood and dwarf pines, and hard by ran a narrow stream, down the steep side of which our man had tumbled the night before.

The shepherds were an uncouth-looking set, and, like all the Mirdites, excessively plainly dressed, in which respect they are a great contrast to the other gay Albanians, and especially to those of Scodra, in whose rich costumes there is a tasteful mixture of white and red, while the women wear a large crimson cloak with a

covering for the head, reminding one of the costume which old women used to wear in England. Amongst the Mirdites the dress of the men consists of a long white woollen coat, which serves also for a shirt, fastened round the waist by a red belt; underneath this are white pantaloons of the same material, tied with ornamented bands about the ankles: their feet are protected by shoes of hide, and their heads by a close-fitting cap of white felt. Their women present a more picturesque appearance, as, in addition to a coat similar to that of the men, they wear red trousers, an embroidered apron with a fringe eighteen inches long, and a blue handkerchief twisted round the head. They are a wiry, active people, but small in stature; indeed they appeared to us quite pigmies after seeing the Montenegrins: their faces are sharp and keen, with a rough expression, but by no means an unpleasant one, for they are less wild and cruel-looking than the other Ghegs. They shave all the head except the back part, where the hair is allowed to grow to its full length (ὅπιθεν κομώοντες); and from this and other customs of theirs, which are generally characteristic of the Mahometan races in Turkey, the stranger finds it hard at first to persuade himself that they are Christians.³⁵

Henry Tozer and his party met Bibë Doda Pasha in Orosh and learned of the customs of the Mirdita, several of which he details:

The custom of forming fraternal friendships, and having adopted brothers (*pobratim*), is common among the Mirdites, as it is also among some of the other races of European Turkey. According to this, two young men engage to support and aid one another during their lives in all contingencies, whether of war or peace. This relationship, which reminds us of some of the passionate attachments of ancient history, such as those of David and Jonathan, of Achilles and Patroclus, is regarded as of the most sacred and inviolable character, insomuch that in some places, according to M. Hecquard, the children of those who have contracted the alliance are not allowed to marry one another; and the same writer mentions the ceremony of initiation observed by some, in which the two persons, after receiving the Communion together, have a small quantity of their blood mixed in a bowl of

wine, which is drunk by both when they have sworn an oath of fidelity, – a primitive form of contract mentioned by Herodotus as existing among the Lydians and Scythians, and by Tacitus, as practised by the Armenians and Iberians. It used even to happen that alliances of this sort were formed between persons of different sexes, but this is now of rare occurrence, for '*messieurs les prêtres*,' said the Secretary, appealing for confirmation to Don Giorgio, who was standing by, 'find that it often leads to concubinage, and use all their influence to put it down.' [...]

The account he gave of the *vendetta* confirmed all that we had already heard of its ravages. Rightly, indeed, has it been called 'the web of murderous feuds at which the barbarian sits all his life weaving, and which he bequeaths to his children.' The following instance which he mentioned may give an idea of its interminable character. Fifty years ago two men of this country quarrelled, and fought so desperately, that both of them died of the wounds they received. Time rolled on, until it might have been thought that the event was forgotten. But it had happened that as they lay wounded on the ground, one of them had managed to deal the other a blow over the head, which caused him to die first. The recollection of this circumstance had been preserved, and only the other day a descendant of the one who died first presented himself before a descendant of the other, and reminded him of the fact, threatening at the same time to burn his whole village unless he gave him one hundred goats by way of satisfaction. The Prince heard of the affair, and, sending for the man, persuaded him to delay his vengeance; but beyond this he could not proceed, for the laws of blood are superior to every other law. Thus the matter stood at the time of our visit. This state of things has given rise to an institution, the existence of which forcibly realises to us the value of a similar establishment among the Jews. A number of the Mirdites who had fled their country as compromised persons from fear of assassination, formed themselves into a colony, and settled in the plain near Prisrend, where they work as labourers. They have since been joined by many others who have left their homes for the same reason, and in this way the place has become a complete city of refuge. [...]

One other custom of this people remains yet to be noticed, viz., their habit of capturing their wives. The Mirdites never intermarry; but when any of them, from the highest to the lowest, wants a wife, he carries off a Mahometan woman from one of the neighbouring tribes, baptizes her, and marries her. The parents, we were told, do not usually feel much aggrieved, as it is pretty well understood that a sum of money will be paid in return; and though the Mirdites themselves are very fanatical in matters of religion, yet their neighbours are reputed to allow the sentiment of nationality to prevail over that of creed; so much so that at Easter the Mahometan shepherds undertake to guard the flocks of the Christians, while at the Turkish Bairam the Christians do the same for the Mahometans. Prince Bib himself won his present spouse in this way. My reader will naturally enquire, as I did on hearing this strange statement, what becomes of the Mirdite women? The answer is, that they are given in marriage to the neighbouring Christian tribes. If any one considers this incredible in so large a population, he is at liberty to adopt the more moderate statement of M. Hecquard, who only speaks of this custom as existing among the chiefs; but I state the facts as they were stated to me, and since the ground of the custom was distinctly affirmed to be the feeling that marriage within the tribe is incestuous, and wherever in similar cases this belief has existed, the custom of exogamy, as it is called, together with the capture of wives, has existed also. I feel very little doubt in my own mind that the stronger statement is the true one. As the Mirdites are the only people in Europe, as far as I can learn, among whom this practice exists.³⁶

French consul, Baron Alexandre Degrand, was also particularly shocked by the rampant feuding:

The sentiment of vengeance is particularly strong among the Mirdita and they often carry the deeds out with terrible cruelty. A sixty-five-year-old man from a village that owed blood to another village of Mirdita had worked for many years as a cook in Shkodra. He had often been abroad and had probably

forgotten the dispute when he returned to his village to marry a woman from his clan. He would send her his wages to buy livestock so that they would have a means of livelihood when he was no longer able to work and returned to the mountains. One evening, a Mirdita man arrived at the door of the place where he was working and told him that his eldest son had fallen gravely ill and needed to see him. With the permission of his employer, the poor man took the highlander in, made him dinner and let him spend the night there so that they could find out what happened to his son. The next morning at dawn he hastened forth to find his ailing son, but he was never to see the child. He had been trapped and was murdered five hours from Shkodra. I later learned from the priest of the village where the murder took place, of the conditions in which the old man was slain. He was stopped along the road by four Mirdita men who told him to say his prayers as they were going to kill him. 'But why?' he protested. 'Your village owes blood to ours and you must pay the price.' He tried in vain to explain to them that he had lived abroad for most of his life and could therefore not be held responsible, but they refused to let him go and repeated what they had said. He then understood and fell to his knees to pray. When he finished making the sign of the cross, they shot him dead and sent for the priest to inform his widow. This was the forty-second murder to have taken place in the mountains within a month.³⁷

The Dibrri Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The *bajrak* of Dibrri³⁸ is situated in the border region of the Districts of Lezha, Mirdita, Puka and Shkodra in northern central Albania. The northern part of Dibrri territory occupies the upper basin of the Gjadër River that flows into the Drin River, and the southern part occupies the basin of the Dibërr or Dibrri River, a tributary of the Greater Fan River. Dibrri borders on the traditional tribal regions of Spaçi to the north, Kushneni to the east, and Vela to the south, and on the lowlands of Zadrima to the west. The main settlements of Dibrri are: Ungrej, Fregna, Kaluer, Kalivaç, Kashnjet, Shëngjergj, Kaçinar and Vig.

Population

The term Dibrri occurs as *Dibri* in an Ottoman document in 1571; as *Diberri* in 1641 in the report of the Albanian bishop of Sappa and Sarda, Frang Bardhi (Francesco Bianchi); as *Diberri* in 1671 in the report of the apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari; as *Dibberi* in about 1685 in the ecclesiastical report of Giorgio Stampaneo, as *Diberri* on the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli, as *Diberri* in the 1694 report of Nicolò Vladagni; and as *Dibri* in the 1866 memoir of French diplomat Emile Wiet. The tribal designation,³⁹ originally a toponym, is related to the Slavic root **dibrbъ* 'valley'.

The Dibrri tribe is entirely Catholic, like the rest of Mirdita. The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, a period during which the Catholic Church was in profound decay, reported:

Leaving the village of Giunali, we arrived in the village of Cacinari [Kaçinar]. There is a church here dedicated to the Birth of the Madonna. This village has 50 homes and 400 souls. The church is made of stone and is well constructed and, with regard to its material, it is covered in boarding. Its floor is in a bad state. The Eucharist is not held here, although there is a tabernacle and no danger from the Turks. It has two chasubles, one of rough cloth of various colours with an overlay stole and a manipule provided by the Holy Congregation. The other one is of purple silk. It has a silver chalice with a gilded cup. The paten is made of gilded pewter. Don Pietro Stampaneo serves here as the parish priest. He takes care of these items. This church has 15 arable fields and a 26-row vineyard. It has a mill and a good number of livestock. Those who take communion, being about 200 in number, give the priest two quarts of grain. He also serves the village of Curta Pulla [Korthpula] that is 12 miles from Cacinari. This village has no church. It has 70 souls, 40 of whom take communion. The priest goes there twice a month to celebrate mass in a private home and more often during Lent for confession and communion. This priest, Don Pietro Caccinari, is ignorant. He can barely read and has no education. He does not know how to write. He does not teach the Christian Doctrine. These mountain people are given to raiding and thievery. They are ignorant of the

significance and the mysteries of our holy faith. Despite his ignorance, he sets a good example and has not caused any scandals, nor does he cavort with rogues.⁴⁰

The patron of the Dibrri tribe was Saint Michael. There was an old Church of Saint Michael (Kisha e Shën Mëhillit) overlooking the Gjadër valley in Kashnjet that was first mentioned in 1629 in the ecclesiastical report of Benedetto Orsini Ragusino. It was torn down during the cultural revolution in 1967 but has since been reconstructed. There was another Church of Saint Michael in Ungrej that was also destroyed in the cultural revolution of 1967.⁴¹

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Dibrri tribe were given as follows: 800 households with a total of 5,774 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Fregna, Gryka e Gjadrit, Kaçinar, Kalivaç, Kaluer, Kashnjet, Kashnjet-Kaftalla, Korthpula, Korthpula-Kaftalla, Mnella, Rras, Sukaxhia, Tejkodra, Ungrej, Vig and Vrih.⁴²

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Dibrri is one of the five *bajraks* of Mirdita. It was not consanguinous with the original three *bajraks*, Oroshi, Spaçi and Kushneni, so it could intermarry with them. Among the Mirdita tribes, Dibrri was said to be one mixed with Tosk (southern Albanian) blood.⁴³

Travel Impressions

Edith Durham travelled through Dibrri territory on her way to Orosh in 1904 before returning to 'civilisation'. She left the following impressions of her trip through the region:

Having lunched at the village han, we struck up into the mountains of the Mirdites. It is all mountainous, but quite unlike any of the other Albanian districts that I know. The soil is a light brown sandy loam with but little rock. Roads could be made here without much difficulty, as little or no blasting would be required. And the whole is thickly wooded. Mirdita, in fact, so far as I saw it, is a huge tract of forest-land, a large part valueless, except for firewood, as the young trees have been browsed by

goats and ignorantly lopped, but there are thousands of pounds' worth of fine timber too, for the most part oak on the lower slopes, and pine above. But though timber can be floated down the Drin from the heart of the land, the Turkish Government, unwilling that Mirdita should earn money, stops the wood before it reaches the sea, and has forbidden the Princess to export. With all its capital locked up, development is a matter of extreme difficulty, and Mirdita is bitterly poor. The people make a little money by selling firewood, sheep's and goat's hides, fox and wolf skins, and the roots and bark of the sumach-tree (for dyeing and tanning). They buy some of their maize from the plain-land, otherwise the country is almost 'self-contained.' Everything is home-made, and all a man has to buy is his gun and ammunition. Every man is armed, usually with 'Martina' and revolver.

Oroshi can be reached in one day from Skodra, but my friends there, unaware of the iron condition into which Albania had wrought me, arranged that I should take two over it. We tracked along in leisurely fashion up the Gjadri, a small tributary of the Drin, meeting now and again a party of natives heavily laden, carrying their goods for sale at the frontier, or a herdsboy, who stared with astonished eyes. Otherwise a few scattered huts were all that told it was an inhabited land. But after the grey desolation of the other mountain tracts of Albania, its greenness and the warm colour of the soil looked almost English.

At eventide we all arrived at a nice little house on a hilltop, with a great wooden cross alongside and a little old priest at the door – a charming old man, who spoke just enough Italian for me to understand him. [...]

Next morning the worthy old man took me out to see his garden, where the roses hung heavy with dew. His village, Kasinjeti [Kashnjet], is scattered, as all the villages are, and but a house or two showed among the trees. Below us lay the densely-wooded valleys, and far away snow-clad peaks showed clean-cut and sharp through the clear pure air of the dawn – an incomparably magnificent view, all wild nature, as unmarked by man as though Adam had not yet been created; and, travelling express, it can be reached from London in seven days! [...]

With Antonio as guard, we followed the route we had come by as far as the Fan i vogele [Fani i Vogël], which we crossed and followed downstream by the track to Kolouri [Kaluer]. This led through a more populated district. Stone block-houses with cultivated patches of ground were more frequent. In one lonely valley a woman's voice shrilled from the rocks above, a long, melancholy recitative; a rhythmic, barbaric chant in strange harmony with the landscape. 'Someone is dead,' said Jin. 'She is telling all about him and what he did.'

He hailed the nearest herdsboy. A man had been shot, he said briefly; that was all. We rode on, and the wild notes died away in the distance.

Kolouri possesses the only shop in Mirdita – a wooden shanty, whose owner serves as go-between in trade between Mirdita and Skodra, and who sells petroleum and tin-pots, the only luxuries in which Mirdita indulges. Here I passed the night and had a festive supper with Jin, Antonio, and the two shopmen.

A short ride next day brought me to the borders of Mirdita. Far below lay the plain of Alessio, and a steep descent brought us down to the village of Kalmeti [Kallmet] and the Princess Bib Doda's country-house by midday.

Antonio was in a hurry to depart and prepare for guests at home on St. Alexander's Day. He said goodbye, and as I sat in the shade of the trees, and looked at the great mountain-wall I had just descended, I realized with a pang that Mirdita, too, was now in the past.

Time had flown. Five months had gone all too quickly. The tribes of the mountains all called me. The Shali and the Shoshi, the Klementi; there were Gusinje and Plava all to see, and they were all within my reach. But I had overstayed my time by weeks, and had little more than the clothes I stood up in. For ten wild minutes I believe I cherished the idea of buying native garments, flying back to the mountains, and ultimately borrowing my return fare from the nearest British Consul. But my route lay over the plain to Skodra, and thence via Cetinje to London.

After Cetinje the charm was broken. I dropped into the West with a shock. Nor did I look as though I belonged to it,

for most of those that I met on the four days' whirl to England said: 'May I ask where you have come from?' And I said: 'I have come out of the wilderness, and I am going back there some day!'⁴⁴

The Kushneni Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The *bajrak* of Kushneni, also spelled Kuzhneni, is situated in the District of Mirdita in northern central Albania. It is centred on the basin of the Greater Fan (Fani i Madh) River and extends southeastwards to the Lesser Fan (Fani i Vogël) River. Kushneni borders on the traditional tribal regions of Dibri to the west, Spaçi to the north and east, Oroshi to the southeast, and Kthella to the south. The main settlements of Kushneni are: Ndërfana, Gëziq, Blinisht, Pëshqesh and Simon.

Population

The term Kushneni is recorded as *Cusnen* in the 1795 report of Tommaso Mariani; as *Cusneni* in the 1866 memoir of French diplomat Emile Wiet; and as *Cuseni*, *Cusneni* on the 1928 map of Herbert Louis.

Kushneni is an entirely Catholic tribe. Its patron is Saint Stephen the Martyr. The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported:

Leaving Lower Fan, we arrived at the village of Blinisti [Blinisht]. There is a church here dedicated to Saint Stephen the Protomartyr. The church has stone walls and the altar is made of wood. Over half of the church is uncovered. Fifteen *scudi* would be needed to complete the roofing. The Eucharist is not held here, although there is no danger from the Turks. There is a chasuble of rough cloth that is not in a bad state. It was purchased by Don Andrea Cogna, parish priest of the church of the Patres Riformati, for two and a half reals. It has a silver chalice and a gilded pewter paten. The church owns 15 stony and infertile fields and a 16-row vineyard. The priest makes his own wine, which is good. He also receives enough grain to cover his needs. This village has 20 homes and 150 souls. Those who take communion, about 80 in number,

give the priest a quart of grain. Near the village of Blinisti there are two other villages. The first is called Fandi maggiore (Greater Fan) that has 25 homes and 200 souls. This village is about 8 miles from Blinisti and has a church dedicated to Saint Demetrius. It is in good material condition. There are no garments of any sort. The Eucharist is not held here. The other village is Rosa [Ras] that has no church. It consists of 8 homes and 64 souls. All of these people go to Blinisti to hear mass and, during Lent, for confession and communion. Two months ago, the priest went blind and the Bishop of Alessio now has to provide for him. Those who take communion in these two villages, being about 100, give the priest two quarts of sorghum. As to the priest, Don Andrea Cogna, he has not been doing his job well, and has not been teaching the Christian Doctrine to his parishioners, among whom ignorance reigns and who do not even know how to make the sign of the cross.⁴⁵

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Kushneni tribe were given as follows: 318 households with a total of 2,430 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Blinisht, Kushnen and Ndërfana.⁴⁶

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Kushneni is one of the five *bajraks* of Mirdita, and indeed one of the original three *bajraks* (Kushneni, Oroshi and Spaçi). These three *bajraks* are consanguineous and thus do not intermarry. Kushneni can, however, intermarry with Dibrri or Fani. The legendary ancestral father of the Kushneni tribe was Gjin Biba, son of Bib Kola. He was the brother of Dodë Biba, the father of Spaçi, and of Mark Biba, the father of Oroshi.⁴⁷

Figures of Note

Ambroz Marlaskaj

The Catholic religious figure, Ambroz Marlaskaj (1884–1939), also known as Ambrosio Marlaskaj, was born in Kushneni and, after schooling in Rubik and Shkodra, was ordained as a Franciscan priest on 26 December 1900. He studied theology and philosophy in Innsbruck

(Austria) from 1902. From 1908 to 1910 he taught at Catholic educational facilities in Austria and Bohemia. On his return to Shkodra in 1910, he served the Church in various functions. From 1918 to 1921 he was director of the Franciscan college of Troshan and became increasingly involved in national politics. In 1923 he was elected to parliament for the Catholic Mirdita region, in opposition to Ahmet Zogu, and was a member of the budget and finance commission, and a captain in the Albanian army. When Zogu seized power in December 1924, Marlaskaj fled to Rome, as did many leading political figures. There he returned to his ecclesiastical career and completed a doctorate in moral theology at the Collegium Antonianum. Marlaskaj was eventually amnestied by King Zog and returned to Albania, but he was arrested in 1933 and interned for a time in Vlora. Returning to Rome, he taught moral theology at the Collegium Antonianum from 1934 to 1938, where he died. He was particularly incensed at the 'mixed marriage' of King Zog and regarded the participation of Catholic dignitaries at the king's wedding in April 1938 as scandalous. Marlaskaj was the author of numerous articles in *Hylli i dritës* (*The Day-Star*) and the Franciscan press.

Daniel Dajani

The Jesuit priest Daniel Dajani (1906–46) was born in Blinisht. He attended school and the Catholic pontifical seminary in Shkodra, and in July 1926 became a novice of the Jesuit order in Gorizia (northern Italy). In Chieri near Turin, he studied theology, philosophy and literature and finished a doctorate with a 'summa cum laude'. In July 1938, he was ordained as a priest. He returned to Shkodra in 1940 to teach, and in 1944, he was made director of the Catholic Saverian College. In September 1945, almost a year after the communists had taken power in Albania, he became rector of the pontifical seminary in Shkodra. The new regime was fanatically anti-Catholic and the situation for the clergy was hopeless. On 31 December 1945 Daniel Dajani was arrested while visiting a village to hold mass for a Jesuit student who had been tortured to death. In early March 1946, after a show trial at which he was accused of being a traitor and a spy for the Vatican, he was shot at the Catholic cemetery in Shkodra.

The Spaçi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The *bajrak* of Spaçi is situated in the Districts of Puka and Mirdita in northern central Albania. Spaçi borders on the traditional tribal regions of Kabashi, Puka, Dibrri and Kushneni to the west, Thaçi to the north, Mali i Zi and Fani to the east, and Oroshi to the south. The main settlements of Spaçi are: Fushë-Arrëz, Gojan, Kalivarja, Gjegjan, Dom, Kimza and Spaç.

Population

The term Spaçi occurs as *Spacci* in the 1866 memoir of French diplomat Emile Wiet.

Spaçi is an entirely Catholic tribe, whose patron is Saint Nicholas.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Spaçi tribe were given as follows: 598 households with a total of 4,230 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Breg, Doç, Gjegjan, Gojan, Gomsiqja, Kalivarja, Kimza, Kisha e Arstit, Lumbardha, Mesul, Qafa e Malit, Shkoza, Spaç and Tuç.⁴⁸

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Spaçi is one of the five *bajraks* of Mirdita, and indeed one of the original three *bajraks* (Spaçi, Kushneni and Oroshi). These three *bajraks* are consanguinous and do not thus intermarry. Spaçi can, however, intermarry with Dibrri or Fani. The legendary ancestral father of the Spaçi tribe was Dodë Biba, son of Bib Kola. He was the brother of Mark Biba, the father of Oroshi, and of Gjin Biba, the father of Kushneni.⁴⁹

The Fani Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The *bajrak* of Fani is situated in the District of Mirdita in northern central Albania. It is located in the upper reaches of the Lesser Fan (Fani i Vogël) River. Fani borders on the traditional tribal regions of Mali i Zi to the north, Luma and Arrëni to the east, Lura and Oroshi to the south, and Spaçi to the west. The main settlements of Fani are: Bisak, Klos, Shënjjin, Domgjon and Thira.

Population

The Fani tribe took its name from the Fan or Fani River and most of the historical references to the term refer to the river. The term occurs as *Fanti* in 1515 in the Breve memoria di Giovanni Musachi; as *Fandi* in the 1610 report of Marino Bizzi; as *Fanta picciola*, *Fanta grande* in 1621 in a letter of Pjetër Budi; as *Fandeimade* (i.e. Fani i Madh) in 1629 in the ecclesiastical report of Benedetto Orsini Ragusino; as *Fante* in the 1634 report of Pietro Maserecco; as *Fanti uogbele* and *Fanti grande* in the 1641 report of Marco Scura; as *Fandi grande* in the 1642 report of Benedetto Orsini Ragusino; as *Fandimade* and *Fandivogel* in the 1663 report of Giorgio Vladagni; as *Fandi maggiore* and *Fandine minore* in the 1671 report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari; as *Fandi piccolo* about 1685 in the report of Giorgio Stampaneo; as *Fande minore* and *Fandina* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola; and as *Fandi* on the 1691 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli.

Fani is an entirely Catholic tribe, whose patron is Saint Mark. Marino Bizzi, the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], passed through the Fani region in the summer of 1610 and made the following observations on the state of Christianity there:

That evening we arrived at Bini [Bena], one of the villages of Fan where the main chieftains of the people there live. Taking advantage of the mountainous terrain in the region, these people have always maintained their freedom without ever submitting to Turkish rule. They are continually at war with the Turks and maraud not only in Albania, which is situated along the coast, but also in Serbia, which is deep in the interior and stretches up to the Danube. They spare neither the Turks nor the Christian subjects of the Turks and with their continuous incursions have laid waste to great reaches of the said province, no less than the misgovernment of the Turks has done, who, as was noted above, have no desire other than to extort and steal from their subjects as much money as they can get out of them. There, I met one of their chieftains, Gjek Laloshi, who, before I went to Rodon, had arrived in Blinisht with a passport issued by the revenue collector of Zadrime. There, publicly, he fell on his bare knees in front of me and begged me, as I was the highest spiritual leader in the country after the Pope in Rome, to give him my blessing since he acknowledged his great

sin in having murdered, with his own bare hands, a great number of his people of every class, many of whom he murdered simply out of greed. I did my best to console him. I was informed that he had been living for many years in that house with a concubine, so I exhorted him to marry the woman because he was committing a sin in the presence of the Almighty. He promised to do everything I said before my arrival in that region, so I fulfilled his request. Following his example, another one of the chieftains, a friend of his who had been living with a concubine for many years, got married at the same time. Both held their weddings on this occasion and almost all the chieftains of the region took part. Whole roasts of mutton were grilled on spits and the meat was distributed on wooden platters with no particular care to cleanliness or refinement, which is missing in these regions.

They are a proud people accustomed to suffering. Most of them walk or run barefoot, both over rocks and on earth. Those who do wear shoes, have them made of rawhide. They wear short pants with their thighs remaining bare so that they can walk more easily and run more quickly. Indeed, they wear little more than these short pants and a shirt both in summer and in winter. They go about armed with shields, javelins, arrows and scimitars, and it is with these weapons that they attack and terrorize the inhabitants of all the surrounding regions. Most of the women are not dressed any better. They wear only a sort of open cloak, but tied in front and with bare arms. Few of them wear blouses, and when they walk, it happens that all the parts of their bodies are exposed by their movement and by the wind. I spoke to the elders about this and urged them, being Christians, to correct this abuse in order not to give the devil an opportunity to promote licentious behaviour among the young people. In this connection, I also gave orders to the confessors to see to it that the women dressed with greater modesty. They, however, replied that no one in that country would be scandalized, for such had been the custom of the land since ancient times. The women of the villages situated on rivers in Albania wade into the water without any concern in order to fill their water jugs and to wash clothes. Their garments float to the surface of the water to such an extent that they are totally

exposed. But such was the reply of the inhabitants of this region [...].

They have a church named after Saint Mark which was half razed by the Turks who had made incursions into the region over the past years. But the people had now assembled the material needed for its restoration. There is a bell on the roof and another one inside the church for the elevation (of the sacraments). It has a chalice and a silver paten. There are graves around the church, at which the sixty-year-old Dom John Zaguri was serving.⁵⁰

The apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported half a century later:

Leaving Cacinari [Kaçinar], we arrived in Fandine minore [Lesser Fan]. This village has a church dedicated to the Birth of the Madonna. It is built of stone. There is an altar set up to Our Lady. The Eucharist is not held here, although there is no danger from the Turks. There is a ragged chasuble of rough cloth, and a chalice with a silver paten. It is in need of a chasuble, a missal, a book of rites and a ciborium. It owns 12 fields and a 10-row vineyard. It is served by Don Theodoro Giansi who was recently ordained as a priest and who takes care of these items. This village has 22 homes and 200 souls. Eighty people take communion. The parishioners provide the priest with two quarts of grain per household. As to the priest, he was accused of having committed thefts before he was ordained, and this was known to the Bishop. He is ignorant. He can read but has no education. He has a bad reputation and does not teach the Doctrine. He goes around bearing a firearm and a knife.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Fani tribe were given as follows: 504 households with a total of 3,332 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Bisak, Domgjon, Konaj, Sëriqja, Shëngjin and Xhuxha.⁵¹

There were also substantial colonies of Fani tribesmen in western Kosovo (around Peja, Gjakova and Prizren). As the Fani region was extremely poor and they did not have enough arable land to support

themselves, 300 families emigrated to the mountains of Hasi near Gjakova in 1840. In the 1850s, there were 4,000 of them working the land and caring for their herds there.⁵² They were noted and feared for their courage and personal pride. It was said that they bought no land, and owned only animals and goods, so that they could flee in time of trouble.⁵³ Many of them originally left Fani for the Gjakova region because of blood feuds.⁵⁴ Emile Wiet, the French consul in Shkodra, noted the presence of Fani tribesmen in Gjakova in 1866:

The Catholic element [is] composed of colonists from the *bajrak* of Fani originating in Mirdita. They have lived in this region for several generations and govern themselves, recognizing no one but the prince of Mirdita as their leader. They are entirely devoted to the sultan and constitute the sole armed force available to him in case of an attack from the Muslim highlanders in the mountains. Last year, they were the victims of an unjust aggression by these highlanders who, because of repeated persecution, want to force the Fani to leave the province so that they can plunder the plains unhindered when the season forces them to leave the mountains.⁵⁵

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Fani is one of the five *bajraks* of Mirdita, though not one of the original three *bajraks* (Spaçi, Kushneni and Oroshi). It was originally part of the Lura group to the east, but joined Mirdita when Luma turned Muslim. Fani is not consanguinous with the three original *bajraks* and can thus intermarry with them.

The Fani were an unruly group in Ottoman times, and thereafter. Because of their continuous marauding and pillaging, the inhabitants of Fani were expelled from their tribal territory by the Sanjakkbey Vërlaci in 1666. Two years later, however, they returned to their homeland. Such punitive resettlement policies, as practised by the Turks in Albania, rarely worked.⁵⁶

The Oroshi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The *bajrak* of Oroshi is situated in the District of Mirdita in northern central Albania. It is located on the left (south and southeastern) bank of

the Lesser Fan (Fani i Vogël) River. Oroshi borders on the traditional tribal regions of Kushneni to the west, Spaçi and Fani to the north, Lura to the east, and Kthella and Selita to the south. The main settlements of Oroshi are Orosh and Mashtërkor.

Population

The term Oroshi occurs as *Orosçi* in the 1671 report by Pietro Stefano Gaspari; as *Orossi* on the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli; as *Orosçi* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola; as *Orosçi* in an ecclesiastical report in 1703 by the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich; as *Orocher* on the 1821 map of French consul Hugues Pouqueville, and as *Orosçi* on the 1928 map of Herbert Louis. The Croatian historian Milan Šufflay (1879–1931) derived the toponym from Aromunian *oraş* 'town', claiming that the Aromunians fled the region when the Turks conquered it. The Austrian linguist Norbert Jokl (1877–1942) envisioned the possibility of an etymological relationship to Greek *ὄρος* 'mountain'. Neither etymology is particularly satisfactory.

Oroshi is an entirely Catholic tribe. Its patron is Saint Alexander (Shën Llesh), to whom the most famous church in Mirdita, the old Abbey of Saint Alexander, was dedicated. This abbey, located in the settlement of Orosh, was first mentioned in 1313 and is said to have been founded by the Benedictines or Basilians.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Oroshi tribe were given as follows: 156 households with a total of 1,160 inhabitants. This comprised the settlement and surroundings of Orosh.⁵⁷

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Oroshi is one of the five *bajraks* of Mirdita, and indeed one of the original three *bajraks* (Oroshi, Spaçi and Kushneni). These three *bajraks* are consanguineous and do not thus intermarry. Oroshi can, however, intermarry with Dibrii or Fani. The legendary ancestral father of the Oroshi tribe was Mark Biba, son of Bib Kola. He was the brother of Dodë Biba, the father of Spaçi, and of Gjin Biba, the father of Kushneni.⁵⁸

In the 1860s, the French diplomat Emile Wiet noted that although Oroshi was the weakest of all the tribes of Mirdita in terms of population, it had general command over the ten *bajraks*.⁵⁹

Travel Impressions

The British traveller, Henry Tozer, travelled through the mountains of Mirdita in 1865. His goal was Orosh where he journeyed to meet the tribal leader Bibë Doda Pasha at the latter's mountain residence. He left the following description of the palace:

The palace or castle of Orosch is an ideal residence of a mountain chieftain, and both the building itself and the life enacted within it carried our thoughts back in many respects to the wildest times of the Middle Ages. The walls are massively constructed of stone, with loopholes at intervals, for purposes of defence, and the whole structure forms an irregular oblong, one end or wing of which is occupied by the Prince and his family. This part we did not enter, for the women are kept in as complete seclusion as in a Turkish harem; of the rest, the ground floor is taken up with stables, while a flight of stone steps leads up to a large hall, open to the air in front, which occupies the greater part of the upper storey. From the roof of this was suspended an iron frame, containing pieces of resinous pine-wood, whose bright flame sent forth the light that we had seen on our approach. The walls on three sides of it were hung with long guns, richly set with silver and beautifully polished, for this is the occupation of the men, while the women perform the more menial offices. At the back of this are large unfurnished chambers occupied by the retainers and guards, who, from their fierce look and long locks that streamed from the backs of their heads, appeared some of the wildest of the human race; and its sides are flanked by two good-sized rooms, one of which formed the dining-hall, while the other was appropriated to our use as a bedroom. Both of these are roofed with the pinewood of the mountains, which was fragrant as cedar and beautifully carved. Round the walls, about a third of the way down, runs a cornice of the same material, below which stand handsome buffets for containing valuables. The windows are small, and carefully guarded with iron bars, and the hearths are open, the chimney not commencing until near the roof, which in consequence is blackened with smoke.⁶⁰

The German geographer, Kurt Hassert, making his way through the mountains of northern Albania in the summer of 1897, found his journey through Mirdita quite adventurous:

On our third day, after an exhausting 16-hour march that took us along steep trails up and over four mountain passes and, each time, down into deep valleys, we reached Orosh, the capital of Mirdita, and were graciously entertained by the abbot. His Eminence Primo Docci [Preng Doçi] is an extremely interesting and politically important figure – the real king of the Mirdita region. He is a true son of the Albanian highlands, although he received a comprehensive education and much experience from twelve years of spiritual activity in North America, India and Europe. I was quite amazed and delighted, in this isolated and barbaric land, to hear him reminiscing about Germany and in particular about the beer in Munich. Under the protection of armed guards, we journeyed over the broad forested ridges of the wild and karstic Nan Shenjt [Nënshat]. Dr Baldacci then returned to Shkodra by another route and I carried on inland. The considerate abbot was kind enough to have a clergyman accompany me to the border of Mirdita, and this measure of precaution was by no means superfluous. As we later learned, one of the *bajraktars* of a region we passed through had followed us with the intent of robbing us. He would have seized upon the collection of topographic sketches I had made on my journey. Because we were quite a way ahead of him, we were able to get away, but in actual fact, things only got more dangerous from then on because we had entered the region made insecure by the Luma tribe.⁶¹

Edith Durham travelled to Orosh in 1904 and left the following impressions, like Kurt Hassert, of her meeting with the Abbot of Mirdita, Preng Doçi (1846–1917).

From the zaptieh's house it is but a short way to Oroshi, and Oroshi was a great surprise. It is in the midst of what is, perhaps, one of the least-known and most isolated peoples of Europe, and it contains one of the most civilized houses in all Albania, the home of a man who is one of the strong personalities of the Near East,

Monsignor the Abbot of the Mirdites, who, single-hearted and single-handed, a man of culture and learning, has devoted himself to the saving of his wild brethren, and lives in the wilderness cut off from all the world.

The Abbot is his own engineer and his own architect. On a wide shelf on the mountain-side stand the church he has planned and built, his house, and the school. The tall white bell-tower of the church stood up white against the mountain beyond, which is cleft by a wide gully, terraced and cultivated. Some twenty houses are scattered up it. This is Oroshi, the capital of the Mirdites. Before the inroad of Dervish Pasha it was a flourishing village of a hundred houses. Now ruins mark where many a house has stood, and the home of the Bib Dodas has never been rebuilt.

The Abbot, whose title is the traditional one for the head of the Church in Mirdita, is in reality a secular priest, for the Benedictine abbey of Oroshi was long ago destroyed. His position is quite a unique one. This wild land of 30,000 people has no temporal head. It is princeless, and there is no tribunal of any kind before which a criminal can be brought. The Abbot is the only power in the land, and his power is purely spiritual.⁶²

The Kthella Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Kthella tribal region is situated in the District of Mirdita in northern central Albania. It is located in the basin of the Greater Smaj (Smaj i Madh) and the Lesser Smaj (Smaj i Vogël) rivers, to the west of the Holy Mountain (Mali i Shenjtë). Kthella borders on the traditional tribal regions of Kushneni and Oroshi to the north, Selita to the east, Bulgëri to the west, and the Mat region to the south. The main settlements of Kthella are: Rrëshen, Prosek, Perlat, Malaj, Sheba and Kthella e Sipërme.

Population

The term Kthella occurs historically as *Chtella* in 1610 in the report of Marino Bizzi; as *Kthella* in 1634 in the report of Pietro Maserecco; as *Stfella di Selita* in 1642 in the report of Benedetto Orsini Ragusino; as *Kthella* in 1672 in the report of Giorgio Vladagni; as *Chesella*

about 1685 in the report of Giorgio Stampaneo; as *Nchtella* in an ecclesiastical report in 1703 by the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich; and as *Ksella* on the 1928 map of Herbert Louis.

Karl Steinmetz, who hiked through the region in August 1905, reported on Kthella as follows:

The region is completely Catholic and has about 300 houses. It is a *bajrak* of its own that consists of ten settlements: Perlataj, Kamec, Rrëshen, Kthella e Epër, Malaj, Sheba, Shqalsh, Tena, Prosek and Lursh, of which only the first three are important. The *bajraktar* lives in Rrëshen. There are churches in Kamec, Perlataj and Rrëshen, the first one being the main church, which is thus known simply as the church of Kthella.⁶³

Kthella was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Kthella tribe were given as follows: 839 households with a total of 3,952 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Ferra-Skurraj, Kthella e Sipërme, Malaj, Perlat (Perlataj), Prosek, Rrëshen and Sheba.⁶⁴

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Kthella was composed of three *bajraks*. Their place of assembly was a spring under a fig tree in Perlat. In 1818, the *bajraks* of Kthella seceded from the Mat region to the south of Mirdita, because of the high taxes imposed by Pasha Sakat Zagolli, and joined Mirdita, which then had eight *bajraks*.

Kthella, Selita and Bushkashi, which is south of the Mat River, were known as the 'three *bajraks* of Little Ohrid'.

Kthella with Mirdita led the tribes of the whole highlands in war southwards, as Hoti did to the north.⁶⁵ They were also notorious as pillagers and robbers. Karl Steinmetz reported in August 1905:

The Kthella tribe is similar in character to Mirdita and Bushkashi. They go on raids to the coastal plain, too, as I have noted, forced as

they are by need. In former times, this profession flourished. On many occasions, 50 to 100 men would join forces to go pillaging. Nowadays, there are only small groups. The Turkish government has understood that it cannot overcome this phenomenon with foreign gendarmes and has hired men from Kthella as *zaptiehs* in its service, who of course know the routes of intrusion and the tricks of their own people. Backed up by regular forces in ample amounts, they guard the passes leading down to the coast. This is, however, not a perfect solution because the guards have families back in Kthella and are afraid of revenge. Confrontations, as a result, rarely involve blood. Normally, the *zaptiehs* and soldiers, who are not keen on risking their lives, begin shooting at a safe distance so that the robbers can take cover. This is not difficult because most of the raids take place at night. When they get back to their camp, the soldiers and gendarmes boast of the courage of their attack and of how many shots were exchanged.

In the interior of this region, there is less security than in Bushkashi. The inhabitants of one settlement do not even trust their neighbours. Attacks and treacherous murders occur among them. It is advisable to keep a good eye on passers-by for a while, even when they have passed you. The number of men who do not dare to leave their *kullas* out of fear of revenge is particularly high in Kthella.⁶⁶

Travel Impressions

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Kthella, which she visited in the summer of 1908:

I started off for Kthela with him as guide. He was a Kthela man, he said, but was originally of Kilmeni (Seltze). 'A long time ago' a family had emigrated and settled in Kthela, and had now expanded into twenty houses, which are intermarriageable with the rest of Kthela. The track, a good one, led along the left bank of the Fani i vogel, over it and up the other side to the church-house of Blinishti, in the bariak of Kushneni.

The little old church is of the usual Mirdite pattern. The tiled roof projects at the end, and is supported on posts to form a large entrance-porch or verandah. A huge oak hard by was thickly covered

with a species of mistletoe—not the English one. I asked about it in hopes of learning some superstition, but found it an object of no interest. From Blinishti we went on to Shpal—the church which is the gathering-point for all Mirdita—and, descending again into the valley of the Fani, crossed it at Peshkes and struck up through wooded slopes for Kthela. A sad massacre of big oaks was going on. A tree is felled, and then the whole trunk is chopped down into one small, irregular plank. The track and the hillside were heaped with chips. A man was hard at work hacking the last felled giant. I vainly urged that a saw was very cheap, and that four or five planks at least could be made from one trunk—much more result for the labour. He and the Kthela men were cross at this, and said this was the proper way. They had always made planks like this, always would, and did not want to be interfered with. They had the right to do as they pleased with their own trees—which was unanswerable.

We rode through wood along the hillside, and, coming out of it at the end, saw all Kthela below us—a sea of forested hills in which scarce a house is visible. One great square-headed mountain, Mal Selatit, rose on the left. At its foot, said our guide, was a fortress of Lek Dukaghin, and beyond it, on the other side, the ‘city of Skenderbeg,’ ruins which few strangers have ever seen. His account was vague; he had been there, but it was very dangerous—all Moslems.

The priest of Kthela welcomed us. His house was very primitive, the short broad planks all axe-hewn, and his beehives, at the back, fenced round with ox and horse skulls on posts, ‘to keep off the evil eye,’ he said, laughing.

Kthela consists of three bariaks—Kthela, Selati, and Perlati. Kthela is all Catholic, the two others mixed. They border on Luria, and Islamism is spreading.

Kthela is chiefly forest, and lives largely by cattle-lifting.⁶⁷

The Selita Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Selita tribal region is situated in the District of Mirdita in northern central Albania. It is located in the upper basin of the Uraka River to the

northwest of Mount Kunora e Lurës (2,120 m.). Selita borders on the traditional tribal regions of Kthella to the west, Oroshi to the north, Lura to the east and the Mat region to the south. The main settlements of Selita are: Kurbnesh, Zajs, Bardhaj (formerly Bozhiq), Lëkunda, Lufaj and Kumbulla.

Population

The term Selita is common in Albania and elsewhere in the southern Balkans. It occurs historically for this region as *Selita* in 1672 in the report of Giorgio Vladagni.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Selita tribe was about two-thirds Catholic and one-third Muslim. It was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

The Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz, who hiked through the region in August 1905, noted the following:

Selita consists of one *bajrak* and counts about 280 households in the following settlements: Lëkunda, Bozhiq [Bardhaj], Lufaj, Gjoçaj, Dajç, Zajs, Kurbnesh, Mëkurth and Kumbulla. Most of the population is Catholic, almost 200 of the families. The rest are Muslim in the settlements of Lufaj, Gjoçaj and Dajç situated near the Matja region. The tribal elder (*plaku i parë*) and the *bajraktar* both live in Kurbnesh. The former is called Gjetë Lesh Gega and the later, Kol Gjetë Bajraktari.⁶⁸

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Selita tribe were given as follows: 393 households with a total of 1,877 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Bozhiq (Bardhaj), Dajç, Gjoçaj, Kurbnesh, Lëkunda, Lufaj and Zajs.⁶⁹

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Selita, Kthella and Bushkashi, which is south of the Mat River, were known as the 'three *bajraks* of Little Ohrid'.

Selita was described as very poor, uncivilised, violent and predatory. Most of the dwellings were *kulla* towers.⁷⁰ Karl Steinmetz noted in 1905

that the men of Selita were notorious for their raids on Reka (now in western Macedonia) and their large-scale sheep-rustling there:

The raids that are conducted on Reka are astonishing. When one hears of them, one is amazed that such things could still be unknown in 'Europe'. One has the impression of being far away from this continent, or somewhere in another age. Reka is a region on the eastern side of Mount Korab and mountain range of Deshat (Dešat planina) that separates it from Dibra. Its population is almost exclusively Bulgarian. In the summertime, the rich pastures of the extensive mountain plateaux there are covered in grazing herds. The men of Selita are attracted by such wealth and are emboldened by the more peaceful nature of the people of Reka. In large bands normally consisting of 100 to 200 men, and never under 50, they set off, usually with the help of the men of Lura, and travel for several nights on end. In the daytime, they hide in the forests, but at night they advance surreptitiously through the valleys and over the mountains, crossing the Black Drin and climbing the eternally snow-covered slopes of Mount Korab, until they reach the Reka region. There, in one fell swoop, they spirit off thousands of sheep and goats, even taking the shepherds with them back across the Black Drin so that their deed is not uncovered until they have left the region. The few bridges that can be used to cross the Drin with herds are guarded by military posts, but what can the soldiers do in the face of such an overwhelming mass of well-armed and resolute men? The success of the raid is celebrated at home with gunshots and feasting, and then the booty is divided up. Raids can, on occasion, fail when the region to be targeted gets wind of their coming in advance. This was the case six weeks before my arrival when a band of some 100 robbers returned bloodied and empty-handed. They had already seized some 10,000 sheep and goats and taken 20 shepherds captive, but the large number of animals slowed down their return. The inhabitants of Reka were able to muster 500 men and catch up with them.⁷¹

CHAPTER 9

THE TRIBES OF THE MAT REGION

The Bushkashi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Bushkashi tribal region¹ is situated in the District of Mat in northern central Albania. It is located along the Mat River to the west and northwest of the town of Burrel. Most of its territory was on the left (southern) side of the Mat River. Bushkashi borders on the traditional tribal regions of Kurbini to the west, Kthella to the north, and the Mat region to the east and southeast. The main settlements of Bushkashi are: Kokërdhok, Bushkash, Stojan (formerly Brinja) and Baz.

Population

The term Bushkashi seems to occur as *Pescasi* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola, although this may also refer to a Peshkesh in Mirdita.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Bushkashi tribe were given as follows: 473 households with a total of 2,191 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Baz, Brinja, Hotaj, Kokërdhok, Shtog and Stojan.²

The Bushkashi tribe, consisting of one *bajrak*, was primarily Catholic (about 70 per cent), although there were Muslims in the Baz area. Although they were situated in the Mat region, they were not really part

of the Mati tribal group, but were a tribe in their own right. Bushkashi was of polyphyletic origin and was thus not a *fis* in the sense of a tribe claiming descent on the male side from one common ancestor.

The Bushkashi were traditionally very poor. There was little cultivation of the land and, as such, much thieving in the lowlands.³

Tribal History

In the early eighteenth century, the Bushkashi had a reputation, at least for the Catholic hierarchy, of being a particularly wild tribe. The tribesmen physically attacked their parish priest and murdered the archbishop's vicar general. Since the poor parish priest was unable to defend himself, the parish was given to the Franciscans in 1702, who then also fell victim to violent attacks from the tribe. In 1704, two new Italian missionaries were slain the moment they arrived in Bushkashi and their belongings and the ecclesiastical apparel they had brought with them were stolen. The Franciscans found no solution but to abandon Bushkashi entirely and settle in a neighbouring village where the inhabitants were more peaceful and civilised. The Bushkashi tribe continued to have a bad reputation among church leaders. In 1754, Archbishop Niccolò Angeli Radovani wrote of them that they were nominally Catholics, but that their actions were those of the devil because they robbed, murdered and sold Christians to the Turks as slaves.⁴

Travel Impressions

Johann Georg von Hahn, who travelled through the region in August of 1867, noted that the Bushkashi were very intent on preserving their independence from the Mati tribes:

We left the *mudir* at two o'clock and thought that we would have enough time to get to Bushkashi before sunset, since it was said to be three hours from Zogolli. However, the fox seems to have measured this timespan with its own tail, because we were caught by nightfall while we were still on the trail. We got lost in some maizefields and so I fired off a few shots to attract the attention of the people of the parish who had been expecting us for several days. Almost immediately, the bells of a nearby church rang out and there were several shots fired that were answered by others at closer and closer range. Although we were aware that bells were

often rung to welcome special guests to Greek monasteries, we felt very perturbed about this dramatic noise coming from a Catholic community, that is, until we were informed that we were wrong to interpret it as a sign of welcome. It was, indeed, quite the opposite. We had terrified the whole region that, since its separation, had kept a watchful eye on anything and everything coming from Matja. A group of armed men approaching from Zogolli in the twilight awoke mistrust, and when we fired our weapons in the dark, there was no longer any doubt that the men of Matja were on the attack, and they gave the alarm signal. Firing back would have made the situation all the more dangerous. However, some families who lived in the vicinity of the parish church understood who we were, and hastened down the mountainside with torches in their hands to meet us.⁵

Hahn stayed with the local parish priest and gathered the following information about Bushkashi:

The parish priest was a young and exceedingly intelligent Franciscan from Naples who had been able to make an impression upon the wild natives and gain prestige among them. The parsonage, a one-storey building, consisted of three rooms and a kitchen, and was all spick-and-span, as was the new church. As another example of the geographical names of the Matja region, the reader should know that the parish is called Brinja, not Bushkashi. There is no actual village called Bushkashi or Biscasio as this term refers to the four villages altogether that make up the rural parish. The natives call it *sheber*, which is, of course, the Turkish word for 'town.' The remains of such a town can, indeed, be found one and a half hours to the north of Brinja, on the right bank of the Mat River, where one can apparently still see the foundations of a large church dedicated to Saint Peter. The missionary priest believed that this settlement was the one that was originally called Bushkashi. He added that he had often asked old people from the region about this town, but that no one had been able to give him the slightest information about it. As to his parishioners, he noted that some of them lived off theft, whereas others struggled to make a living from handicrafts. On occasion,

Christians and Muslims – 10 to 40 men at a time – gather to go raiding, expeditions which they undertake down to the coastal plain as far away as the vicinity of Durrës. They are particularly keen on rustling grazing cattle, but will pilfer anything they can get their hands on. The followers of both faiths, of which the Muslims are a small minority, live here in complete equality and relative harmony. The priest denied that they intermarry, but was then forced to admit this fact during our conversation. It was said that in the neighbouring parish of Pedana [Bërzana], there used to be mixed marriages in which pork and mutton were stewed in the same pot, with the Christian spouse eating the one meat and the Muslim spouse the other. Blood-feuding in this region is so unbridled that the parish priest is unable to do anything about it. In Matja, he stated, that there are more weeks of the year in which more than one man falls victim to feuding than weeks in which no one dies. He insisted that he would accompany me to the archbishop because I would otherwise never get there alive.⁶

The Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz, who hiked through the region in August 1905, reported the following of the wild Bushkashi tribe:

Bushkashi is the smallest of the territories that I visited this time. It comprises only the northeastern slopes of the mountain after which it is named, Mount Bushkash. It borders on the Mat River to the north, on Mount Bushkash to the west and southwest, and on the Karica stream to the east and southeast. Bushkashi is a poor mountain region that is difficult to reach. It has extraordinarily steep slopes with deep ravines cut into them. It is out of these ravines that the two largest streams, the Lunreja and the Traja, flow in the direction of the Mat River. There is little agriculture and larger homesteads are rare. The crops consist here mostly of maize, with some rye. Here and there one sees vineyards, but all the households grow tobacco, and they have onions, garlic, cucumbers, tomatoes and paprika in their gardens. The land is used principally for herding. Particularly suitable for this purpose are the high pastures of Maja e Skanderbegut and Trolla on Mount Bushkash. This is where the herds spend the summer months. In the winter, they are kept in pens near the houses. The cows and

oxen are then fed on maize cobs and the abundant hay, whereas the sheep and goats, that make up the majority of the domestic animals, get only the leaves that were raked up and stored in the summertime. They also keep a lot of pigs, and every household has chickens. Many families also keep bees. However, agriculture and herding together are not enough to survive on, and both have declined substantially over the past few years. The result has been extreme destitution. Bushkashi and the Lezha highlands (Malësia e Lezhës) are among the regions of Albania that suffer the most. Many families go hungry. Under such circumstances it can be of no surprise that they endeavour to get what they need from the more prosperous coastal plain. There are few men who do not claim to have taken part in predatory raids. For this reason, any man from Bushkashi caught in the lowlands, whether he has come for peaceful or hostile purposes, is arrested by the authorities. Men from this region are not allowed to visit the nearby market towns of Kruja and Lezha. Only the women are allowed to attend market there. Plundering has a long tradition here. It has become a custom, passed from one generation to the next, even when there is no material need for it. This custom derives from an earlier age when the Bushkashi lived high up in the isolated ravines of Mount Bushkash and when the present-day villages in the lower regions did not exist. It was only half a century ago, when life got very difficult up in the mountain ravines, that they gradually descended and settled in the valley.

Mention must be made here of one famous bandit from Bushkashi, Marka Kuli, because all of Albania knows him and his courage has been praised in many lands. All the people I asked, both farmers and missionaries, replied: 'He was a real man!' He became lord and master of the coastal plain after his repeated raiding and pillaging, expeditions that he carried out with audacity and much luck. The people of the lowlands regarded him as invincible and trembled at the very sound of his name. In the spring of 1903, the Turkish government decided to send a punitive expedition up to Bushkashi and to Kthella, a tribe of equally predatory proclivities. The commander of the gendarmerie of the Vilayet of Shkodra, Essad Pasha, marched up to Bushkashi with several hundred foot soldiers and two pieces of mountain

artillery, and surrounded the *kulla* of Marka Kuli that was located near Shtog in the Mat valley, about an hour away from Brinja. There, in the stone tower, they found their man with five of his companions, but he refused to surrender. The artillery tore large holes into the walls of the *kulla*, but Marka Kuli held out all day long. When it got dark, he and his companions broke through the enemy lines and sought revenge for the destruction of the house by cutting off the food supply route for the troops, provisions that could only reach them through the Mat valley and over Mount Derven. The expeditionary corps was thus obliged to abandon its mission before completion. Since the men of Bushkashi and Kthella had blocked the above-mentioned route back, the Turkish forces were obliged to ask for Mirdita's permission to cross its territory to get back to the coast.

Marka Kuli did not enjoy his reputation for long, although this event probably took it to new heights. He died a year later in the lowlands, south of the Mat. He had gone horse-rustling there and was busy driving the stolen horses up into the mountains at dawn. On his way, Marka Kuli came across a farmer who shot him without even knowing who he was. Had he known, he would never have had the courage to exchange fire with him. Marka's younger and less known brother, Zef Kuli, tried to maintain the family reputation. He was, however, shot six months later, though not while raiding in the lowlands. He was slain by a fellow tribesman not far from his own *kulla*. Zef Kuli had lent money to this neighbour and had tried in vain to get the sum back. One day, as he was put off again, he withdrew muttering that he was going to recuperate the money by force of arms. The next day, he turned up with a Mauser in his hand in front of the *kulla* of the debtor. Hardly had he reached the gate when the debtor and his two sons opened fire on him. Zef Kuli was hit in the chest and in one arm, yet he managed to fire five shots at his foe, one of which, having penetrated the heavy door, wounded the debtor in the hand. This event is typical of conditions in this territory.

Bushkashi and neighbouring Matja and Kthella do not enjoy the autonomy granted by the authorities to the Catholic mountain regions north of the Drin River and to Mirdita. In actual fact, however, as can be seen from the above-mentioned expedition of

Essad Pasha, all three tribes are independent. They pay no taxes and govern themselves, without paying the slightest attention to Shkodra or Istanbul. The Turks only enter Bushkashi territory when they are well-armed.

Bushkashi forms a *bajrak* of its own with Baz. However, it is a loose association with the latter settlement situated in the direction of Matja. Usually they only hold one annual tribal assembly, a *kuvend*, which is devoted to deciding on relations with the neighbouring tribes. Baz has 60 Catholic and 40 Muslim households. Bushkashi, for its part, is entirely Catholic and consists of five settlements: Kokërdhok, Shtog, Stojan, Brinja and Hot, a total of 150 households. But relations among these five settlements are loose. The head of the *bajrak*, the *bajraktar*, has no power at all. In contrast to the rigidly organized mountain tribes north of the Drin River, there is almost total anarchy and individual independence here, as in Kthella, Selita and Lura. In the north, there is due process of customary law valid for the whole region. Here, on the other hand, everyone decides and acts as he pleases - every man for himself. It is the responsibility of the family in question to take revenge on a murderer, robber or thief. The tribe as such does not get involved. The only retribution known, even for minor offences, is the bullet because no one can force a perpetrator to appear for trial, nor can peace and pardon be bought here with money. All that is known is the bitter maxim of 'blood for blood.' As such, blood-feuding in Bushkashi and the other above-mentioned tribes is much more prevalent than it is among the notoriously feuding tribes of Nikaj and Shala. If a family is caught up in a feud, the adult males are no longer able to leave their *kulla* and often spend years indoors in voluntary detention, and the women have to do all the farm work. It is evident that the extreme poverty of the region is a result of this phenomenon. As a result of the feuds, many families leave Bushkashi entirely and settle in Matja where they are willingly taken in. They live there as tenant farmers or are employed as shepherds because the families in Matja live off agriculture and do not know much about herding. The tenants give the landowners half of the crops they produce, but are allowed to keep their own animals.

Despite all of this, one should not gain the impression that the people of Bushkashi are wild and savage robbers. I was quite surprised, if not to say disappointed. Everywhere I went, I was treated with kindness and they all made such a peaceful impression on me that I felt more at home here with the wild Bushkashi than with any other tribe on the whole trip.⁷

The Composite Mati Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Mati tribal region⁸ corresponds broadly to the District of Mat in northern central Albania. It is located in the interior basin of the Mat River. Mati borders on the traditional tribal regions of Bushkashi and Benda to the west, Kthella, Selita and Lura to the north, and Dibra to the east. The main settlements of Mati are: the capital and market town of Burrel, Burgajet, Macukull, Shulbatër, Gurra e Madhe, Klos and Zibër-Murriza.

Population

The Mati tribe derives its name from the Mat River. This river name was recorded in Latin as *Mathis* by the fourth-to-fifth century writer Vibius Sequester and in ancient Greek as *Μάτη*. The term also occurs historically as *Mathia* in 1308 in the Anonymi Descriptio Europae Orientalis; as *Mat* in 1488 in an Ottoman tax document;⁹ as *Matia* in 1515 in the Breve memoria of Giovanni Musachi; as *Machia* on the 1554 Mercator map; as *Mattia* in the 1570 anonymous *Relazione dell'Albania*; as *Ematthia* in the 1591 report of Lorenzo Bernardo; as *Emathia* in 1596 in Jaques De Lavardin's *Historie of George Castriot*; as *Mathia* in 1610 in the report of Marino Bizzi; as *Matthia* in 1614 in the report of the Venetian writer Mariano Bolizza; as *Ematia* in 1621 in a letter of Pjetër Budi; as *Man*, a misspelling or misreading for *Mat*, in 1662 in the Seyahat name of Evliya Çelebi; as *Emathia* in the 1671 report by Piero Stefano Gaspari; as *Mathia* in about 1685 in the report of Giorgio Starnpaneo; as *Matis* in 1821 on the map of French consul Hugues Pouqueville; and as *Máthis* in 1848 in the journal of Edward Lear.

Mati was a large, mostly Muslim, tribe made up traditionally of six *bajraks*: Burrel, Klos, Lis, Lukan, Prell and Zibër. It was closely related to the tribes of Dibra and Lura.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Mati tribe as a whole were as follows: 3,986 households with a total of 23,643 inhabitants.¹⁰

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Mati, like Dibra, is not a tribal region in the sense of a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor. It is far more a region with a good degree of collective identity that acted as a military unit in times of conflict, in the sense of a *bajrak*.

The Mat region in the interior of Albania, i.e. the basin of the Mat River, consists of rolling hill surrounded on all sides by mountains and has offered protection to its inhabitants since early times. Because of its isolated nature yet clement environment, the German historian Georg Stadtmüller (1901–85) advanced the thesis that the Mat region was the cradle of the Albanian nation,¹¹ i.e. that one can trace the origins of the Albanian people specifically to this region. Yet, although it has been settled since the Bronze Age at least, there were never any large urban settlements in Mat until the modest growth of Burrel in the mid-twentieth century.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Mat region was divided into the realms of four ruling families: (1) the Zogolli family in the northern part of Mat. It inhabited the right (northeastern) bank of the Mat River. This family, from which Ahmet Zogu, later known as King Zog, stemmed, had its fortified *seraj* (manor, palace) on a hill above the village of Burgajet; (2) the Allamani family in the western part of Mat. It inhabited the Mat River south of Burrel, primarily on its left (western) side and had its *seraj* in the village of Kurdaria, later known as Kujtim; (3) the Çelaj family in the eastern part of Mat. It inhabited the right (eastern) bank of the Mat River and it had its *seraj* in the village of Patin; and (4) the Bozhiqi family in the southern part of the Mat region. It had its *seraj* in the village of Klos.

Johann Georg von Hahn, who travelled through the region in August 1867, reported on these families as follows:

The Mat region is very divided. This can be seen in the fact that it is inhabited by four different clans headed by one or more leading families, each of which is, of course, only a *primus inter pares* in the

region. The Bozhiqi inhabit the upper valley of the Mat, then come the Çelaj who rule over the southern part of the valley. After this are the Olomani or Alamani, and the north of the valley is the homeland of the Zogolli. This is, however, only the general view for, on closer inspection, we find that these families are mingled and that all four of them are present in some villages. In addition to this, these families can be divided into what are more or less major groupings and smaller groupings that would need to be studied separately for better information.¹²

The history of Mat in the twentieth century is very much associated with the figure of Ahmet bey Zogolli (1895–1961), also known as Ahmet Zogu who ruled Albania from 1924 to 1939, most of this time as a monarch, King Zog. He inherited rule of the Zogolli clan at an early age on the death of his father, Xhemal Pasha Zogolli (1860–1911).

Figures of Note

Pjetër Budi

The early Albanian writer, Pjetër Budi (1566–1622), known in Italian as Pietro Budi, was the author of four religious works in Albanian. He was one of the great figures of early Albanian literature. Pjetër Budi was born in the village of Gur i Bardhë in the Mat region. He could not have benefited from much formal education in his native region, and trained for the priesthood at the so-called Illyrian College of Loretto (Collegium Illyricum of Our Lady of Luria), south of Ancona in Italy, where many Albanians and Dalmatians of renown were to study. At the age of 21 he was ordained as a Catholic priest and sent to Macedonia and Kosovo, then part of the ecclesiastical province of Serbia under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Antivari (Bar), where he served in various parishes for an initial 12 years. In 1599, he was appointed vicar general (*vicario generale*) of Serbia, a post he held for 17 years. In 1610, Budi was referred to as ‘chaplain of Christianity in Skopje’ and, in 1617, as chaplain of Prokuplje. In Kosovo, Budi came into contact with Franciscan Catholics from Bosnia, connections, which in later years, proved fruitful for his political endeavours to mount support for Albanian resistance to the Ottoman Empire. As a representative of the Catholic Church in the Turkish-occupied Balkans, he lived and worked in what was no doubt a

tense political atmosphere. His ecclesiastical position was in many ways only a cover for his political aspirations. In 1616, Pjetër Budi travelled to Rome, where he resided until 1618 to oversee the publication of his works. From March 1618 until about September 1619, he went on an 18-month pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Back in Rome in the autumn of 1619, he endeavoured to draw the attention of the Roman curia to the plight of Albanian Christians and to raise support for armed resistance. In this connection, he was in contact with the influential Dalmatian diplomat, Francesco Antonio Bertucci. On 20 July 1621, Budi was made bishop of Sappa and Sarda (*Episcopus Sapatensis et Sardensis*), i.e. of the Zadrina region, and returned to Albania the following year. His activities there were now more openly political than religious in nature. One of his interests was to ensure that foreign clergymen were replaced where possible by native Albanians, a step that could not have made him particularly popular with some of his superiors in Italy. In December 1622, some time before Christmas, he drowned while crossing the Drin River. Pjetër Budi's principal publication is the *Dottrina Christiana* or *Doktrina e Kërshenë* (*Christian Doctrine*), a translation of the catechism of Saint Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621). It was published in Rome in 1618 and is preserved in only one original copy. The Albanian *Christian Doctrine* was subsequently reprinted by the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in Rome in what would seem to be relatively large editions in 1636, 1664 and in 1868. In 1759, it is known that there were still 960 copies of the book in the depository of the Propaganda Fide. Of more literary interest than the catechism itself are Budi's 53 pages, some 3,000 lines, of religious poetry in Albanian, appended to the *Christian Doctrine*. Pjetër Budi is the first writer from Albania to have devoted himself to poetry.

Ahmet Zogu (King Zog)

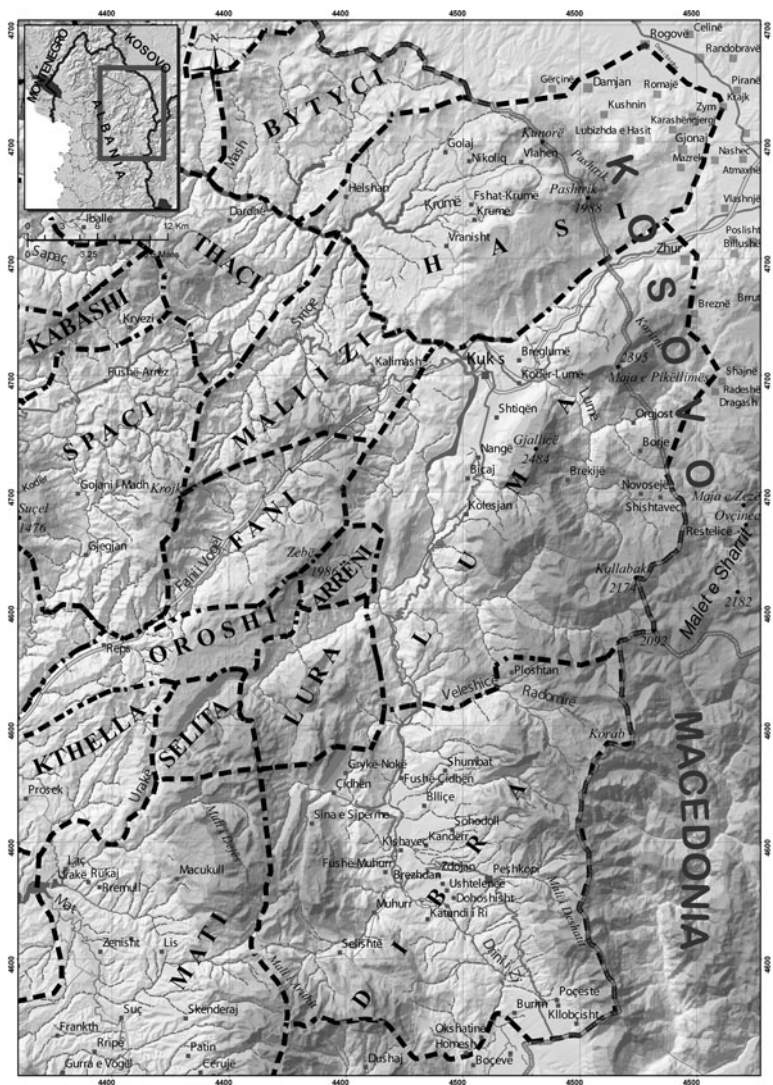
The Mat region is most commonly associated with Albania's one-time monarch, King Zog. Ahmet Muhtar bey Zogolli, later Ahmet Zogu (1895–1961), was born in Burgajet in the Mat district. Through his mother Sadije he was related to Essad Pasha Toptani (1863–1920). He spent his early years, from 1903 to August 1912, in Constantinople, where he had been sent as a hostage, and, after his return to Albania, he commanded an Albanian volunteer brigade fighting on the side of Austria-Hungary during World War I. After much time in Vienna, he

took part in the Congress of Lushnja in January 1920, and in the period 1920–2 he served as minister of the interior under Sulejman bey Delvina and then as minister of defence. It was in this period of his gradual rise to power that he changed his surname from Zogolli to Zogu. On 2 December 1922, he formed a conservative government himself and held onto power until 23 February 1924, when an attempt was made on his life. Zogu fled to Yugoslavia after the so-called Democratic Revolution, which saw the ephemeral rise to power of Fan Noli (1882–1965) in June 1924. With Yugoslav support he organised volunteer corps including remnants of tsarist White Russian forces and returned to take over Albania. His forces occupied Tirana on 24 December 1924, bringing an end to Noli's short experiment in democracy. On 15 January 1925, Zogu formed a new cabinet of so-called 'constitutional legality'. He declared Albania, which was nominally still a monarchy under a formal Regency, to be a republic and made himself president thereof on 31 January of that year. Despite the fact that he had come to power with Yugoslav support, he began to ally himself increasingly with Yugoslavia's rival in the Adriatic, fascist Italy. After an initial trade agreement between Albania and Italy, the two countries signed a first Pact of Tirana on 27 November 1926 and a second Pact of Tirana on 22 November 1927, the latter providing for mutual assistance in case of attack. These treaties gave Italy *de facto* control over Albania as a protectorate.

On 1 September 1928, with Italian support, Ahmet Zogu declared himself to be Zog I, King of the Albanians, and the Zogu clan became the new royal family. Over the coming decade, the authoritarian monarch endeavoured to maintain a degree of independence from Mussolini's increasingly colonialist designs, but, in the end, he was forced to give in. When Italian troops invaded Albania on Good Friday, 7 April 1939, with the firm intention of staying, Zog and his family, Queen Geraldine (1915–2002) and their newly born son Leka (1939–2011), left Albania for good and fled overland to Greece. On 15 June 1939, Zog received news that he had been granted asylum in Britain on condition that he be financially independent (he had taken seven crates of gold from Tirana with him!) and refrain from political activity. The exiled royal family initially settled in France, but moved in June 1940 to The Ritz Hotel in London until they could find permanent quarters. Also residing at The Ritz during World War II were King George II of

Greece and King Peter II of Yugoslavia. In November 1941, the Albanian party moved to Parmoor House in Frieth, Buckinghamshire, in the Thames Valley, although the king later also kept an office at The Ritz. King Zog spent the war years in Britain trying to gather support for the Albanian resistance and for himself. By this time, his authority among the Albanians and his royal title were severely questioned. British official circles ignored him as a potential galleon figure to rally opposition to the Italian and German occupation of Albania.

With the communist takeover of Albania in late November 1944, Zog realised that there was no hope of return. He was formally deposed in Albania on 1 January 1946. Through his friendship with the Egyptian ambassador in London, he was invited to settle in Egypt under King Farouk (1920–65), who was himself partly of Albanian origin. On 12 February 1946 he set sail from Liverpool with an entourage of 30 people and with 2,000 pieces of luggage. From Egypt (Cairo and Alexandria) where he and his family stayed from February 1946 to the summer of 1955, Zog reorganised the monarchist *Legaliteti* (Legality) movement and endeavoured to gain the support of anticommunist Albanians in exile, but with limited success. By this time, the chain-smoking Zog was ill with cancer and the project was dropped. His last move, organised by the queen, was to Villa St Blaise in Cannes on the French Riviera (July 1955). The exiled king died of stomach cancer at Hôpital Foche in Suresnes near Paris and was buried in Thiais. His remains were transferred to Tirana in November 2012.



The tribal regions of the Upper Drin Basin

CHAPTER 10

THE TRIBES OF THE UPPER DRIN BASIN

The Hasi Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Hasi tribal region is situated in the Has Mountains (Malësia e Hasit) around Mount Pashtrik (1,983 m.) on both sides of the Albania–Kosovo border. It corresponds to the present District of Has in northeastern Albania and part of the Municipality of Prizren in Kosovo. Hasi is located on the right (northern and western) bank of the White Drin River to the northwest of the town of Prizren, approximately from Zhur in the south to Gjakova in the north. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Bytyçi to the north and Luma across the White Drin River to the south.

The main settlements of Hasi are: Kruma (the administrative capital of the district), Perollaj, Cahan, Tregtan, Pogaj, Shalqin, Golaj and Nikoliq in Albania, and Zym, Pllaneja, Mazrek, Gjonaj, Karashëngjergj, Rogova and Bishtazhin in Kosovo.

Hasi is traditionally divided into Hasi i Rrafshit (Hasi of the Plateau), also called Hasi i Butë (Soft Hasi), Hasi i Prizrenit (Prizren Hasi) or Hasi i Gjakovës (Gjakova Hasi) consisting of 60 villages mostly in Kosovo; and Hasi i Brijës, also called Hasi i Gurit (Stone Hasi) or Hasi i Thatë (Dry Hasi) consisting of 24 villages mostly in Albania. The Hasi had close contacts with the other tribes of the Gjakova highlands (Malësia e Gjakovës).

Population

The term Hasi occurs as *Hassi* in 1570 in the anonymous *Relazione dell'Albania*; as *Has* in 1634 in an ecclesiastical report by Pietro Maserecco, as *Hassi* in 1650 in an ecclesiastical report by Giacinto da Sospello, as *Hassi* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola; and as *Hassi* in 1821 on the map of French consul Hugues Pouqueville. The term is related to Turkish *bas*, an Ottoman military fief, as the region was referred to in Ottoman source material in 1571 and 1591 as the *nahiye* (subdistrict) of the military fiefs.

The Hasi are a primarily Muslim tribe, although there are also Catholic settlements on the Kosovo side of the present border, in particular around Zym, Karashëngjergj and Bishtazin. The region itself was earlier ethnically mixed with Serbian and Albanian speakers. At the beginning of the twentieth century there were 50 villages with 2,400 Serbian-speaking Muslims, 1,550 Albanian-speaking Muslims, 750 Catholics and 200 Orthodox.¹

Hasi is not a tribal region in the sense of a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor. Like Luma and Lura, it is an ethnographic region with a distinct history and identity, and consisted of two *bajraks*. The large *Bajrak* was centred in Vlahna and the small *Bajrak* in Helshan.

As with the neighbouring Luma and Mal i Zi tribal regions, Hasi was inhabited by peoples of various tribal origins. There were Berisha in the settlements of Kruma and Perollaj; Bytyçi in Mujaj, Cahan and Qarr; Gashi in Kishaj, Mujaj and Metaliaj; Kastrati in Kruma, Golaj and Pus i thatë; Hoti in Qarr; Krasniqja in Kruma, Mujaj, Qarr and Vlahna; Thaçi in Helshan, Kishaj, Kruma, Mujaj and Vlahna; Morina in Gjinaj, Helshan, Kishaj, Kruma, Pus i thatë, Metaliaj and Perollaj; and Shala in Kishaj, Kruma, Metaliaj and Vlahna. The Serbian anthropologist Milenko Filipović (1902–69) collected the following data on the presence of various tribes in Hasi i Rrafshit, i.e. on the Kosovo side of the present border, in 1940: Krasniqja with 110 families in nine villages; Berisha with 128 families in 15 villages; Thaçi with 188 families in 20 villages; Morina with 127 families in 16 villages; Kabashi with 66 families in eight villages; Bytyçi with 114 families in 19 villages; Shala with 105 families in 14 villages; Hoti with 32 families in six villages; Gashi with 22 families in two villages; and Shkreli with 13 families in seven villages.²

On the Albanian side of the border, the population is primarily Muslim, and traditional customs are adhered to here somewhat more than elsewhere in the region. Although men and women eat separately in many Muslim regions of the north, at mealtime in Hasi households the women did not even enter the dining room to serve the meals, but gave the men their food through a kitchen hatch. This tradition is still observed in some Hasi homes.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Hasi was under Ottoman administration from the time of the Turkish conquest in the late fourteenth century until 1912. It revolted against its Ottoman rulers in Gjakova on several occasions in the nineteenth century, notable during the uprisings of 1837, and took part in the League of Prizren in 1878 and the League of Peja in 1899. The villages of Hasi suffered much damage and destruction during the anti-Ottoman uprisings from 1909 to 1912 and during the Serbian invasion of 1912.

With the Serbian conquest of Kosovo and the independence of Albania (1913), a political border was created that cut Hasi territory into two. The population on the Kosovo side of the present border was now under Serbian and later Yugoslav rule, and the population on the Albanian side of the border was within the newly independent Albanian state. Albanian independence initially brought no gain for Hasi as the settlements on the Albanian side lost access to their two main trading markets in Gjakova and Prizren, and were reduced to hunger and extreme poverty. The border separating the two halves of Hasi remained more or less impervious until 1999.

Travel Impressions

The Bosnian Croatian priest, Lovro Mihačević, travelled through Hasi in 1907:

When we left the New Inn, we had a good look at both banks of the Drin River. On the left we could see the Koritnik mountains and Luma behind them. On the right side was Mount Pashtrik, at the foot of which was the region of Hasi and its villages. There is no easy explanation of the word Hasi. In Turkish, one would use the word *has* or *hasi* to describe a tribe or an individual who has

received great privileges and special rights from his master, and is now strong, proud and disobedient. In Croatian, there is also an expression that the Croats use for an individual who has attained power and has become self-conceited: '*poasio se*' (he has become *hasi*). Indeed, the inhabitants of this region are insolent, hot-tempered and cruel, even though they are appallingly poor. They are tall, have a proud and fiery expression on their faces, have a high and proud brow, and twirl their moustaches. One can see that the name quite suits them.³

Edith Durham, who visited the region in the summer of 1908, left the following impression of Hasi:

Following Drin down a short way to its junction with the Kruma, we struck up the valley of the Kruma, and were in the land of the Hashi [Hasi]. A great wall-like cliff, rising on the stream's left bank, is known as the fortress of Lek Dukaghin.

Hashi is a large tribe, variously reckoned at 600 to 1,000 houses, the large majority of which are Moslem. It is separated by the White Drin from the Moslem tribe of Ljuma [Luma] on the one side, and on the other marches with the Moslem Krasnich [Krasniqja]. Hashi land includes the Pestriku [Pashtrik] Mountains, which the Mirdites state to be their own ancestral home. They migrated to their present home, and the land was subsequently occupied by Hashi, which is no relation to Mirdita.

We left the Kruma, and rode on to a high undulating plateau of loose, friable soil, covered with stunted oak-scrub, parched and sun-scorched. There was neither shade nor spring. A Moslem friend of the *kirijee's* hailed him, and invited us all to take our midday rest at his place. The nearest spring on the track, he said, was two hours' distant, but he had plenty of water. We accepted gratefully, and followed him uphill. He had two houses side by side—ramshackle shanties made entirely of wood, save for the large chimney and fireplace of clay built up at the side. [...]

Returning to our track, we rode for over an hour through dull, dusty oak-scrub, then into a wood, where we watered the horses at the two-hour spring, and pushed on, as it was absolutely necessary to arrive before nightfall—passed a few wooden houses at

Helshani, and met scarce a soul upon the road. It was a deserted wilderness. A long ascent brought us to the top of the pass, Chafa Prushit, and there lay Djakova [Gjakova] on the plain below, with a long descent of rolling hill between us and it—red roofs glowing among green trees, slim white minarets twinkling delicate like lilies.⁴

They had never seen a woman in European dress, and were greatly amused at my arrival armed only with an umbrella. They occupy the Pestriku mountains, traditionally a former home of the Mirdites. They were hospitable and allowed me to pass through their land, but were so unused to foreigners and so afraid that their admission might bring about foreign annexation that I asked no questions about origin or anything personal.⁵

Figures of Note

Pjetër Bogdani

One prominent representative of the Hasi tribe was the Catholic religious figure and writer of early Albanian literature, Pjetër Bogdani (ca. 1630–89), known in Italian as Pietro Bogdano. Born in Gur i Hasit (now Bregdrini or Gjinar) near Prizren, Bogdani was educated in the traditions of the Catholic Church to which he devoted all his energy. His uncle Andrea or Ndre Bogdani was archbishop of Skopje. Bogdani is said to have received his initial schooling from the Franciscans at Čiprovac in northwestern Bulgaria and then studied at the Illyrian College of Loretto near Ancona (Italy), as had his literary predecessors Pjetër Budi and Frang Bardhi. From 1651 to 1654, he served as a parish priest in Pulat in northern Albania and, from 1654 to 1656, he studied at the College of the Propaganda Fide in Rome where he graduated as a doctor of philosophy and theology. In 1656, he was named bishop of Shkodra, a post he held for 21 years, and was also appointed administrator of the archdiocese of Antivari (Bar) until 1671. In 1677, he succeeded his uncle as archbishop of Skopje and administrator of the Kingdom of Serbia. His religious zeal and patriotic fervour kept him at odds with Turkish forces and, in the atmosphere of war and confusion that reigned, he was obliged to flee to Ragusa (Dubrovnik), from where he continued on to Venice and Padua, taking his manuscripts with him. Pjetër Bogdani is remembered as the author of the *Cuneus prophetarum*

(*The Band of the Prophets*), Padua 1685, the first prose work of substance written originally in Albanian (i.e. not a translation). After arranging for the publication of the *Cuneus prophetarum*, Bogdani returned to the Balkans in March 1686 and spent the next years promoting resistance to the armies of the Ottoman Empire, in particular in Kosovo. He contributed a force of 6,000 Albanian soldiers to the Austrian army, which had arrived in Prishtina in October 1689, and accompanied it to capture Prizren. There, however, he and much of his army were met by another equally formidable adversary – the plague. Bogdani returned to Prishtina but succumbed to the disease there in December 1689. His nephew Gjergj reported in 1698 that his uncle's remains were later exhumed by Turkish and Tartar soldiers and fed to the dogs in the middle of the square in Prishtina. So ended one of the great figures of early Albanian culture, the writer often referred to as the father of Albanian prose. His *Cuneus prophetarum* is a vast treatise on theology and was published in Albanian and Italian with the assistance of Cardinal Barbarigo. It is considered to be the masterpiece of early Albanian literature and is the first work in Albanian of artistic and literary quality.

The Luma Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Luma tribal region is situated in the District of Kukës in northeastern Albania and in the western part of the Municipality of Sharr (Dragash) in Kosovo. It is centred on mountainous terrain around the valley of the Luma River that flows into the Drin River near Kukës. It is the mountainous territory situated to the south of the White Drin River and mostly to the east of the Black Drin River. Luma borders on the traditional tribal regions of Hasi across the White Drin River to the north, Mirdita across the Black Drin River to the west, and Dibra to the south. Traditionally, Luma territory extended from Zhur, west of Prizren in Kosovo, to Kalis in the south. The traditional market town and regional administrative centre for Luma is now Kukës, although in the nineteenth century, it was heavily dependent for its necessities upon Prizren. The main settlements of Luma, mostly small villages, are:

Bardhoc, Bicaj, Domaj, Gostil, Gjegjën, Kolesjan, Lusna, Përbreg, Shishtavec, Shtiqën and Topojan.

Population

The tribal or regional term Luma was first recorded in 1571 as a *nahiye* of the sanjak of Dukagjin. The name is no doubt related to Alb. *lumë*, *luma* 'river'.

The Luma were a relatively large and powerful tribe. However, they were not a tribe in the sense of a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor. Luma is an ethnographic region with a distinct history and identity and some authors do not regard it as a tribe in any sense. As with the neighbouring Hasi and Mal i Zi tribal regions, Luma was inhabited by people of various tribal origins. There were Gashi in Nanga; Krasniqja in Shtiqën; Shala in Bicaj, Surroj and Manza; Thaçi in Kolesjan; and Berisha in Ujmisht.

Luma consisted of seven *bajraks*: 1) Rrafshja or Luma proper with its *bajraktar* residing in Bicaj – they stemmed from a seventeenth-century ancestor called Xhuxh Bici; 2) Tejdrintia with its *bajrkatar* in Domaj and formerly in Kolsh; 3) Kalis with its *bajraktar* in Mahalla e Poshtë; 4) Qafa with its *bajraktar* in Bushtrica; 5) Radomira with its *bajraktar* in Tejs; 6) Çaja with its *bajraktar* in Fshat; and 7) Topojan with its *bajraktar* in Brekija. The Russian scholar Ivan Stepanovič Jastrebov (1839–94) who travelled through the region at the end of the nineteenth century referred to these seven *bajraks* and noted their respective strengths as follows:

Rrafshja (Bicaj)	800 households
Tejdrintia	460 households
Kalis	130 households
Qafa (Bushtrica)	280 households
Radomira	530 households
Çaja	130 households
Topojan	500 households ⁶

The Luma tribe was entirely Muslim. Islam spread here in the Ottoman period, initially along the right side of the Black Drin, i.e. into areas that had formerly been Orthodox. Shi'ite dervish sects

were also active in the spread of Islam in Luma, in particular the Halveti sect.⁷

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Luma tribe were given as follows: 2,781 households with a total of 17,978 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Arrën, Bicaj, Kolesjan, Kolsh, Lusna, Mamëz, Surroj, Ujmisht, Bushtrica, Buzëmadhja, Ceren, Gjegje, Doda, Fshat, Shkinak, Kalis, Matranxh i epër, Matranxh i qafës, Palush, Ploshtan, Radomira, Shullan, Vasiqe, Vau Vila, Bardhoc, Dobrusha, Gostil, Kukës, Kulla e Lumës, Morin, Nanga, Përbreg, Shkoza, Shtiqën, Vërmica, Xhahi and Zhur.⁸ Despite the substantial decimation it suffered during and after the Serbian takeover of the region in 1912–13, Luma was by far the largest of the tribes of the north, matched only by Mirdita.

History

Like the other tribes of the region, Luma was in constant conflict with the Ottoman authorities in the nineteenth century and no doubt earlier, not only because they refused to pay taxes and provide conscripts, but also because of their custom of plundering and pillaging the surrounding region. Indeed, the Luma tribe was notorious in the late nineteenth century for its rapacious ways. In this, it was no different from marauding Mirdita, Kelmendi and other tribes. The merchants of the nearby town of Prizren lived in constant fear of Luma attacks and were often unable to conduct trade and furnish the town with goods because the trade routes could not always be used. The Luma were the terror of the region.

At the time of the League of Prizren (1878), the seven *bajraks* of Luma joined forces and demanded that the Porte cease interfering in their affairs. Uprisings occurred in 1884–5, 1893 and throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. By 1903, the leaders of Luma were demanding local autonomy and sent the Turkish governor Shemsi Pasha a note stating: 'The people of Luma are resolved to live according to the customs they have inherited from their ancestors.'⁹

During the First Balkan War beginning in October 1912, Serbia took advantage of the power vacuum left by the crumbling Ottoman Empire to invade and conquer Kosovo and the Luma and Dibra regions in late October and early November of that year. While the Great Powers recognised Albania as a sovereign state on 29 July 1913, Kosovo, Luma,

Dibra, Ohrid and Monastir remained under Serbian military rule and, on 7 September 1913, King Peter I of Serbia proclaimed the annexation of the conquered territories. A large uprising against Serbian rule took place in the Luma region and in the mountains west of Gjakova, which was suppressed by a force of over 20,000 Serbian troops who advanced into Albania, almost reaching Elbasan. An amnesty was declared by the government in Belgrade in October 1913, yet the pogroms against the Albanian population continued. During this uprising and later during World War I, the Luma tribe was decimated by Serbian forces. Edith Durham recalled:

When I knew it, this was a large and strong Moslem tribe. In 1912–1913 it suffered very heavily. A Serb officer in my presence described how he and his battalion had bayoneted all the women and children in part of the tribe, because ‘women bear children,’ and laughed till he choked over his beer. The Serbs were ‘liberating the land from the Turkish yoke.’ On subsequent inquiry, I learnt that some 1,400 persons had been massacred. Part of this tribe is now under Serb rule.¹⁰

In a letter to Lord Cromer, she wrote from Podgorica:

Some Serbs came here, and at the diner table mentioned the Ljuma (Albanians, Moslems, near Prizren). I said that when I was there I was hospitably received. A burst of laughter followed: ‘Go there now and look for your friends; you won’t find one! We have killed them all.’ I asked why, and was told: ‘They killed one of our telegraphists and sixteen men who were with him, and we sent back a battalion and exterminated them! Not one man survives.’ I have been repeatedly assured that there will be no Moslem problem ‘because not enough will survive to make one.’¹¹

An ‘Official Report to the Great Powers’, published in December 1913, detailed:

No less terrifying were the horrors perpetrated in the District of Luma, in particular: in Shullan, general pillaging, torching. All the population had their throats slit, with the exception of three

persons who, hearing the screaming and trepidation of the women and children, understood what was going on and took flight into the forest. In Dodaj and Kiushtan, the houses were pillaged and torched. There were 13 victims. In Tropojan, the houses were reduced to ashes and the population of over 500 souls was exterminated. In Çerem, everything was pillaged. Over 350 animals were carried off. There were 23 victims, among whom were seven religious leaders. In Krusheva, on the orders of Loglop, secretary of the Serb Government in Prizren, the family of Haxhi Ibrahim, composed of eight members, among whom were three women and a one-year-old baby, two four-year-old girls and one six-year-old girl, were killed in cold blood by the *soldateska*. In Bushtrica and Bilush, pillaging and torching of everything. The population, irrespective of gender and age, was put to the sword or burned alive. The animals, caught while grazing, were carried off after the shepherds were slaughtered. In Çaja and Matranxh, general plundering. About 600 animals were carried off. In Vasiaj, Palush, Gjabrec and Draç, general plundering. All supplies and all objects having any value whatsoever were stolen. Over 800 animals were carried off. In Gjinaj, Lusna, Kalis and Vila, in addition to looting, 71 houses were torched, 123 people killed – men, women and children – and 2,121 animals were carried off. In Ujmisht, plundering and torching of 21 houses. There were 15 victims, among whom a woman, a three-month-old baby, a little boy of four, one of five, and two of eight. 480 animals were carried off. In Xhaferraj, Brekija, Nimça, Lojmja, Përbreg, all the houses were razed to the ground. The population encircled by the Serbs was ruthlessly massacred. Several were hanged from the branches of trees, most of them had their throats slit. Some were cast into the flames and others suffered even worse torture before perishing. In Brekija alone, a large village of over 150 houses, there were over 1,300 victims – men, women and children. In Përbreg, the number of victims probably exceeds 400. Of the whole population of these five villages, only two inhabitants of Xhaferraj and five of Nimça managed to escape extermination. Other scenes of savagery and carnage took place in Surroj where 130 houses were torched and 55 men and 2 women were slain. The two villages of Bardhovca and Novoseja were burnt to the ground. The

population fled up into the mountains, except for the wife of Islam Hanxhi and her four small children and the family of Ramadan Jusufi, who were burnt alive. The 1,620 animals caught while grazing, among which 320 large ones, were carried off. In Sula e Fushës and Arrëza, 34 houses were torched. There were 11 victims and all the animals, 610 of them, were carried off.¹²

Serbian forces only withdrew from the region in late 1916 when Austro-Hungarian troops conquered much of northern and central Albania. Thereafter the devastated region was returned to Albania.

Travel Impressions

The German geographer, Kurt Hassert, making his way through the mountains of northern Albania in the summer of 1897, reported:

The Luma tribe was originally Christian. Now they are fanatic devotees of Islam and are the greatest robbers in upper Albania who, with their continuous attacks, have destroyed the once flourishing herding industry in the Sharr mountains and are a constant peril for the commerce of Prizren. They live in total independence and neither provide troops nor pay taxes; their mountains have never been visited by travellers. As such, we did not continue our journey with very positive expectations.¹³

The Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz, who hiked through the region in August 1903, noted in a similar vein:

When I arrived, there was hectic military activity on the roads because a mobilization was underway. The wild inhabitants of Luma made up the strongest contingent. Although they refuse to do regular military service, an opportunity for plundering and marauding now meant that they were ready for war.¹⁴

The Bosnian Croatian priest, Lovro Mihačević, travelled through Luma in 1907:

We soon caught sight of the Luma [Ljuma] River and proceeded along the left bank of the Drin until we reached the Novi Han

(New Inn) located on the bank of the Drin. 'So this is dreaded Luma!' I thought to myself, 'of which I had heard in Scutari.' The inhabitants of its banks have a grisly reputation, even for Albania. They are the terror of the town of Prizren where, as if out of the blue, shrieks of horror of '*Luma, Luma!*' are wont to echo in the streets. The whole town loses its head at this call. The merchants swiftly close their shops and run home, barring and securing the gates of their courtyards to protect themselves from the attacks of these marauding savages.¹⁵ [...]

Luma is a *kajmakamat* of its own of the Sanjak of Prizren and stretches in the west to the Vizier's Bridge. Its southwestern border is on the Black Drin, and the mountains make up the western edge of it. The *kajmakam* resides in the village of Bican or Bicaj where the military barracks are also located. Luma is also a *bajrak* of its own. The region is fertile and has enough water, but there are not many people. A good number of the men die in blood feuds or in raids on the neighbouring regions. Up until the eighteenth century they spoke a mixture of Croatian and Bulgarian here. Nowadays they are all Muslims and all speak Albanian.¹⁶

Edith Durham, who visited the region in 1908, described her journey as follows:

Following Drin down its lonely and most beautiful valley, we came to its junction with Lumi Ljums (the river of Ljuma), and crossed it by a slim and elegant stone bridge, guarded on the farther side by a *kula*. We were in Ljuma, the land of the most notoriously independent of all the Moslem tribes.

As we were watering the horses, up rode a fine old man, who leapt from his saddle and greeted us hilariously—shook hands with me and rubbed cheeks with Marko. My presence struck him as a huge joke. No strangers were allowed in his land, he said, but, as they had given *besa*, I could go where I liked. He wished us '*Tun gbiat tjeter*,' and rode off. The men at the *kula* roared with laughter. He and his whole house were the most notorious 'holders-up' of wayfarers in the district. Our *kirijee* told with glee how this very man and his party had 'held him up' on this very track two years

ago, when he was travelling with a priest, to whom he had promised safe-conduct. 'Stand aside,' they said; 'you are a Moslem. Our business is with the Giaour.' I said: 'Those I convoy are my business. If this is a joke, it is a silly one. I am a Vula. If you shoot me you will have to settle with all my people.' They let me through. Not many people care to quarrel with all the Vulas.

Following down the White Drin, we crossed it by the Ura Nermienies (middle bridge), one of many arches built by the Vezir who built Ura Vezirit, and came to where White Drin meets Black Drin.

A little below this stands Han Brutit, by a stream that flows to the river. The *han* is a large stable, with a small house attached. The *hanjee* and two wayfarers were hobnobbing outside.

'You can have a room up there,' he pointed, 'if you like. But I am an honest man, and tell you plainly it is swarming with bugs. I wouldn't sleep in it myself. You had better sleep in the stable.' The rest of the company corroborated this—from experience. I decided on the stable. There was hay to sleep on; three eggs each for supper. Board and lodging were secured.¹⁷

The French travel writer Gabriel Louis-Jaray (1880–1964), who was making his way from Kosovo to Mirdita, stopped at Kukës in the summer of 1909 and met representatives of the Luma tribe there:

Kukës is wonderfully situated on a small plateau about a hundred metres above the Drin River. It looks like an island or a fortress, with the Drin to the north serving as its moats. To the west and south is the Black Drin that emerges out of the mountains here and flows into the White Drin not far away. Just below Kukës, it forms a large curve, the inner side of which contains a dried-up lake with ponds here and there reflecting in the sunshine. To the east, the Luma River, whence we arrived, encloses the fourth side. This little plateau dominates the three valleys, those of the Drin to the east and the west, and that of the Black Drin to the south, the waters of which subside and dissipate at Kukës. There are three high mountains in the background. To the north are the mountains of Has, the distant peaks of which form a continuous line. To the southwest is the Maja e Runës and the neighbouring

lower hills that separate Mirdita country from Luma. To the southeast, finally, is the cone-shaped Gjalica, which raises its rocky head to an elevation of over 2,500 metres and dominates the whole region. It is the heart of Luma territory.

Sul Elez Bey and his men were waiting for me outside the entrance to his *kulla*, around which about a dozen wretched huts had been built that made up the whole village. From the information I was given and from what I was able to confirm here, I understood that the bey was only the head of a village, a peasant among peasants. He was both the chief and equal to the rest. He was not the sort of landowning bey who owned a whole village and populated it with his tenant farmers. Each family had its own hut, its own flocks and its own land. But Sul Elez Bey was the head of an old family that traditionally commanded this tribe. He was wealthy in property, he had a large family and extended relatives, and his influence was widely acknowledged. As the bey of Kukës, a site that is strategically located at the confluence of the rivers and at the junction of trails constituting the most important routes of communication in the region, Sul Elez Bey played an important role in the country and his support was nothing to be sniffed at.

There he stood, a bit in front of a dozen fine men, the oldest of whom were just as upright and sturdy as the younger ones. The clothes that many of them were wearing were different from those of the Albanians in the lowland towns. Their white flannel or woollen trousers with black trim were baggy and were closed at the ankles with gaiters. Their woollen shirts were replaced by a wide cloth garment that fell to their knees. Over it, all of them were wearing a vest or bolero in more or less coarse cloth but also more or less embroidered. The vest of the chief was luxurious compared to the rest, and he had a silver chain around his neck. The white cap, as round as that of an altar boy or flat like a travelling bonnet, was standard apparel for all, as were the rawhide sandals and the wide belts in which each of them had stuffed cartridges, weapons, tobacco, watches and such provisions. A further complement to this costume were the rifles over their shoulders. You can imagine the impression they made on me when I first caught sight of them.

Once we exchanged greetings, Sul Elez Bey invited me into his house. The moment I entered, I was, as it were, under the protection

of his sacred *besa*. I was his guest and was thus inviolable. All the men of the tribe were now obliged to be hospitable towards me and to defend me with their weapons. I entered the *kulla*. It was a square building with four thick stone walls and deep foundations anchored in the soil. The main floor was a simple room to store wood and tools and did not have a direct connection to the upper floor. The latter was reached by a wooden staircase, rather more like a ladder placed against the outer wall of a building that could be removed in an instant. The upper floor consisted of one large room divided into two parts: one side was for the provisions and the other side was for guests. This is where one spent the night. As to furnishings, there were only carpets laid out on both sides of the high wood fireplace. Both air and light penetrated the room by means of the low-placed doorway on which the staircase was leaning, and by two windows which were rather more like slits in the wall, high above the ground. Between the carpets was the brick flooring right to the hearth. The embers were at once stirred up and coffee was made. When I entered, I removed my boots, as is custom here. No one enters the living room with his shoes on as the carpets in an Albanian home also serve as beds and chairs. Everyone thus takes them off and places them carefully in a corner of the room, together with his weapons, and then takes his seat on the carpet. The *cafedji* [coffee maker], a servant especially for this job, prepared the coffee and offered me a cup. In the meanwhile, someone went out to pick some pears and I was given several of them. They were small, but ripe and juicy.

My hosts sat cross-legged. This position exhausts me, especially after a seven-hour horse ride, so I stretched out with the saddlebags behind me to support my back, and the conversation began. With the help of my dragoman, I explained to them where I had come from and where I was going, what my plans were and what I wanted to ask of them. I wanted to cross Luma territory to get to Mirdita to the south. No European had yet taken this trail and I was curious to see it. They deliberated among themselves for quite some time. The bey, his brother and the eldest man of the tribe who seemed to constitute a village council discussed what trail ought to be taken. The Luma tribe was in bad relations with the neighbouring tribes, and it was important to avoid their lands and to get to Mirdita via friendly territory. With Sul Elez's recommendation, the Mirdita

would give me their *besa*. The discussion continued for some time. I noticed that they were a bit uneasy. Finally, the bey told me that I was to take the mountain trail which was safer at the moment than the track up the valley. He would give me an escort of men from his tribe who would accompany me to the border of their land and would hand me over to a friendly tribe to whom their tribe had earlier provided assistance.

I then asked them about the situation in Albania. The bey had just received news from Prizren that the *mutasarraf* was demanding the payment of tithes. I asked what he intended to do, and he replied: 'We have never paid them, why should we start now? They give us nothing and we ask for nothing. There is nothing and no one we need from them. So why do they make such demands of us?' Indeed I could think of no service that the State had ever rendered to them.

The central government has not existed for them for decades, probably for centuries. They do not recognise the Turkish Government, only the religious authority of the sultan in matters of faith. Aside from this, these tribes are entirely independent. They are traditionally grouped into confederations. Luma, Mirdita, Hasi and Malësia, etc. are the names given to them. But in the northern mountains, these confederations do not recognise any sovereign authority. They are an agglomeration of tribes, whose territories have long been marked out, and each of them governs itself freely. In case of grave danger, the chiefs of the tribes gather and take decisions jointly. These are usually experienced warriors who rise either against the Turkish authorities, against the Christians, upon an appeal from the sultan for holy war, or against other tribes. In their relations, however, they observe one common law. This is a sort of traditional code like the law of the Salian Franks or that of the Visigoths in ancient Gaul. It is called the law of Dukagjin. Conflicts arise between the tribes for many reasons and result in blood feuds. Blood can only be requited by blood. It is thus always uncertain as to whether one can travel from one tribe to the next. One day they are friends and the next day they are enemies. As such, they have only intermittent and varying relations. During my visit, the Kukës clan had good relations with the neighbouring tribes of the Mirdita confederation, but claimed

that it had good reason to complain about the other clans of Luma, of which it was part. [...]

This region is very poor in arable land and hardly able to sustain its inhabitants. The people thus feel the need to emigrate, temporarily or permanently, to make a living, or sometimes only to purchase the fine arms of which they are extremely proud – an abundance of gunpowder, cartridges, modern rifles or the pistols that they hang around the pommels of their horses. They are well informed about most modern weapons and, while they may not all have them, some do and others want them. The oldest among them asked my dragoman: ‘Does the Frank have rifles?’ On hearing our reply in the negative, he added: ‘Well, tell him when he goes back to his country that he would make us very happy if he sent us a Mannlicher. That would be the finest present he could give us.’¹⁸

Figures of Note

Mubarrem Bajraktari

Colonel Muharrem Bajraktari (1896–1989) from Ujmisht, a political figure and guerrilla fighter of the Zogist and World War II periods, was a prominent leader of the Luma tribe. He attended school in Shkodra and trained in 1914 at a military academy in Innsbruck (Austria). In World War II, he served with Austro-Hungarian troops and subsequently with the Serbs. He joined the forces of Ahmet Zogu in 1919. In June 1924, he was expelled as commander of Kukës by Bajram bey Curri (1862–1925), and in December of that year he took part in the successful coup d’état of Zogu. He subsequently sentenced members of the so-called Democratic Revolution who had not fled the country to prison. He was then made commander of the police force in the northeast of the country. In 1926, he led a punitive expedition against the rebels of Dukagjin, and in 1929, he was made supreme commander of the gendarmerie under Sir Jocelyn Percy (1871–1952). In 1931, he was appointed aide-de-camp to King Zog. In December 1934, having been dismissed from the gendarmerie for lack of co-operation with Percy, Bajraktari rose in revolt against increasing Italian encroachments and fled to Yugoslavia and, in 1936, to Paris. He returned to Albania after the Italian invasion in April 1939 and organised a band of approximately 1,000 guerrillas in his native Luma region, where, as

an independent northern tribal chieftain, he took part in the Legality resistance movement until the end of the German occupation. A report in the British Foreign Office archives by Billy McLean (1918–86) describes him as having a persecution complex that sometimes verged on insanity. Bajraktari took to the hills after the communist takeover in 1944 and then escaped abroad. He and his men fled to Macedonia and, in September 1946, they crossed the border from Monastir (Bitola) into Greece. After some time in a refugee camp in Piraeus, he continued on to Rome where in September 1949 he became an independent non-party member of the National Committee for a Free Albania. In 1957 he moved to Brussels, where he died.

The Lura Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Lura tribal region is situated in the District of Dibra in northeastern Albania. It is located between the eastern slopes of the Mount Kunora e Lurës (2,120 m.) and the left (western) bank of the Black Drin River. Lura borders on the traditional tribal regions of Mirdita to the west and northwest, Arrëni to the north and northeast, and Mati and Dibra to the south. The main settlements of Lura, all very small, are Arrë-Mallë, Arth, Borie-Lurë, Gur-Lurë, Krej-Lurë, Lura e vjetër (Katundi i vjetër), Pregj-Lurë, Suma and Vlashaj.

Population

The term Lura was recorded as *Luria* in 1641 in the report by Marco Scura; *Luria* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola; *Luria* about 1685 in the report of Giorgio Starnano; *Luria* in 1707 on the map of the French cartographer Guillaume Delisle;¹⁹ and *Luria* on the 1928 map of Herbert Louis.

Lura not a tribal region in the sense of a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor. Like neighbouring Hasi and Luma, Lura is an ethnographic region with a distinct history and identity. Some authors do not regard Lura as a tribe in any sense.

The Lura tribe consisted of four *bajraks*: Lura, Dardha, Çidhna and Reçi (of Dibra). The latter three were, however, often considered independent tribes of their own right.

Lura was originally a Catholic tribe but rapidly turned Muslim in the nineteenth century. As in Mërturi and Nikaj, it was not unknown in Lura for there to be Catholics and Muslims in one and the same family.

The original Catholic parish was founded in 1639 but it only had a resident priest from 1826 onwards.²⁰ Its conversion to Islam was noticed by several scholars. Johann Georg von Hahn, who travelled through the Black Drin region in the late summer of 1867, reported as follows on the situation:

I had alway regarded the Lura tribe, the only Catholics in the region of the Black Drin River, as vassals of the chief of Mirdita who lived only six hours away from them. Surrounded as they are by Muslims, it is only to the west that they have contact with a Catholic area, the district of Orosh; and it would thus seem a political necessity, given their vulnerability, that they seek support from their powerful neighbours against the common foe. But this was not the case. When I was in the region, I heard only that the Lura and Oroshi tribes were in constant conflict over their common border. I therefore broached the subject with the parish priest and received the following information from him. The border of Lura traditionally stretched to the Camadolese²¹ monastery of Saint John (Shën Gjini), the ruins of which are located one and a half Turkish miles east of Varosh. At its zenith, this monastery owned not only the large southern pass but also the smaller eastern pass to the narrow valley of Oroshi. The trail to Lura leads over the latter.

In front of this monastery stood, and stands to this very day, a huge tree that marked the border between the territory of Oroshi and that of Lura. This tree was decorated every year at the Feast of Saint John with the banner of Lura, and the parish priest of Oroshi came over to hold mass here. Many people from the area attended this feast, both Christians and Muslims, and a fair was held that was of some importance. Such was the tradition until 1830. Then, the Oroshi tribe laid exclusive claim to all of the west side of the Buza e Malit mountain, and would only allow the Lura tribe to let their animals graze up to the pass. The result was war and much bloodshed. Even more damage was done to the herds on both sides because every time one side grew in strength,

they stole all the flocks of the other side that were found grazing in this disputed area.

Finally, however, the Lura tribe, as the weaker, was forced to give way, and the border was fixed on the pass of Buza e Malit mountain, as Oroshi had wanted. Although peace has been restored, there is still much ill will between the two sides, and marriages between them are as rare as between Christians and Muslims, although both sides acquire their women only from outside the tribe.

According to what the prefect told me, the Christian population of Lura is now on the decline. The situation is as follows. Lura was once entirely Catholic. In the parish register for 1757, mention is made of 124 households and of 1,001 souls. From then on began the gradual process of conversion to Islam. The following tale is told about the reasons behind this. The Muslims of the neighbouring settlement of Çidhna once murdered the parish priest of Lura, Pater Gervasius, who held the office of an apostolic prefect. To avenge the death of their priest, the men of Lura slew 14 Muslims and, when Osman, the pasha of Prizren, heard of this deed, he banned the Lura tribe under threat of death from visiting Prizren market and all the other markets in the region. In addition, no priest had been found to take up the parish of Lura, which remained unoccupied for 15 years. The fall of Catholicism dates from this period, such that there are now only 23 Catholic households in Lura as opposed to 90 Muslim households.²²

The Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz, who hiked through the region in August 1905, added the following information half a century later:

According to Hahn in 1863, who was never in Lura himself, the once so Catholic region had 90 Muslim and 23 Catholic households. Today, there are only 22 Catholic families in Lura, out of a total of 300 families. The Muslims have thus tripled their population, without immigration, whereas Catholicism has receded. One finds families in which some members are still Catholic, whereas the others have converted to Islam. There are

eight Catholic families left in Lura e epërme, six in Kreja, five in Sumaj, two in Vlashaj and one in Pregja.²³

The Bosnian Croatian priest, Lovro Mihačević, arrived in Lura in August 1907, exactly two years after Steinmetz, and remarked:

The next day, accompanied by the local parish priest, Brother Bono Nikaj, we went to see Brother Jozo Messi in the next parish. That evening we told them all about what we had seen and experienced in Lura and they told us about the members and non-members of their parishes, i.e. about the Catholics and Muslims. One could almost say that in Lura, the Muslims are still half-Christian and the Christians half-Muslim. In Lura we had stayed at the home of a Catholic village elder whose brother was a Muslim. One of the brothers celebrated Christmas and the other Bajram. One of them baptised his children as John and Peter and the other one gave them names such as Sylar and Osman. In Lura, Catholic families give their daughters in marriage to Muslims, as do Muslim families to Catholics.²⁴

In his 'Brief Information on the Tribes of High Albania, in particular on the Independent Mountains' in 1841, Nicolay, Prince of the Vasoyevich, gives the population of Lura as 4,000, of whom 1,000 were men in arms.²⁵

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Lura tribe were given as follows: 265 households with a total of 1,605 inhabitants.²⁶

Travel Impressions

The Austrian engineer Karl Steinmetz noted his impressions of Lura in the following text:

Drizzle falling from the grey heavens impeded our view as we left the *kulla* of Mark Zoçi. The sombre atmosphere was, however, conducive to the wild nature we were entering and to the mystery of the goal I had set myself. My heart was throbbing hard. In a few hours I would be in Lura, a land that no one had ever seen, a realm blocked off from the outside world and torn to pieces by blood-

thirsty vengeance unparalleled anywhere in Albania. On the other hand, it was also described as a pearl of nature. The old parish priest of Kthella had told me much about it on the arduous trail over the pass to Lura – of an underground river and of the imprint of a horseshoe left in stone by Scanderbeg's stallion. [...] Hiking down the slopes covered mostly in oak forests, we passed the little settlement of Pregja, situated on a small terrace of land. A quarter of an hour farther down, someone called up to us from a hut made of branches and leaves. It was Gjetan Ajazi who had built an alpine refuge here because his animals were up in summer pasture in the nearby mountains. Herding is the main occupation of the men of Lura because they have excellent mountain pastureland and lots of hay. Farming is only conducted in the valley of Lura e epër and on the little terraces along the slopes. The main product here is maize, although they also have enough wheat that grows well in Lura e epër despite the elevation. Also produced is an exceptionally strong form of tobacco, but the tobacco fields are few and far between. Grape-growing has been abandoned altogether because, as pious Muslims, they drink neither wine nor brandy.²⁷

He did not fail to note that blood-feuding was a major problem in the region:

Of the 300 families in this land, no less than 250 are caught up in blood feuds. In no other region of Albania are there fewer men outdoors than here. They are all in hiding, fearful of the avenger's bullet.²⁸

Lovro Mihačević, for his part, was fascinated by Lura's natural beauty:

From Holy Mountain (Mali i Shenjtë), we rode down to the village of Kreja where we had to change guides. There were no men available anywhere, because they were all hiding in their homes and dared not go out because of a recent blood feud. They were afraid of the avenger. We were given a chubby and healthy twelve-year-old girl who proved to be quite talkative and told us all about the recent case of blood-feuding. At noon we arrived in

Lura, a village and parish, where we spent two days and two nights with the parish priest to rest and enjoy the beauties of this wonderful mountain region. We were itching to climb up to the top of Mount Kunora e Lurës to see the majesty of nature with our own eyes, and were told that the mountain top was a veritable pearl to behold.

The village of Lura is 1,100 m. in altitude and Mount Kunora rises to an elevation of 2,110 m. Accordingly, we had 1,010 m. to climb on foot. We left early in the morning, accompanied by some locals, and reached the lake in a splendid forest of beech and fir trees that stretched proudly to the heavens. We enjoyed the fresh air and fragrant resin. The lake was about one kilometre long and not quite half as wide in the deepest and darkest part of the fir tree forest. The branches of the trees dipped right down into the water. The icy water was dark blue and made me think that it must be very deep.

A little farther up, above the large lake, there is another smaller lake that flows into the larger one below. I was fascinated by everything I saw at this lonely altitude, over 2,000 metres, and rejoiced for a full two hours in the tranquillity and idyllic scenery. As to the lake, I can only say that it was marvellous, but awesome in its isolation. We climbed for a further fifteen minutes until we reached the mountain peak and could catch a glimpse of the surroundings. And what a view! Before us lay all of Albania. To the east we could see Dibra and Svetigrad, the site of the epic battles of the courageous George Castriotta Scanderbeg and his band of fearless fighters. Below was the Zeta [the Black Drin] and the verdant hills around it where Scanderbeg once concealed his troops so that they could come out to ambush and vanquish Turkish pasha with their iron grip. And today? The decaying bones of fallen heroes cried out to us: *Exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor* [An avenger shall arise from my bones].

It was 5 August [1907], a warm and pleasant day. One could not have wished for better weather. The time had come for us to leave hospitable Lura. Returning to the village of Kreja, we climbed up over Mount Valmora, crossed several creeks and torrents, and entered the *bajrak* of Selita, where we passed through the settlements of Macukull, Bozhiq [Bardhaj] and Barbullej, and

waded across the Uraka, Lusa and Mat rivers, the latter of which gives its name to the region as a whole. We lost our way for a while but then, late in the evening, managed to find the parish of Bushkashi.²⁹

Edith Durham left the following impressions and information on Lura, which she visited in the summer of 1908:

We came out of the wood, and dropped down over grass land to the river. We were in a splendid and most fertile plain, ringed round with lofty mountain and lordly forest—quite the finest spot I know in all Albania. Beyond the river stood the wretched half-ruined church and house of Katun i veter, where a luckless young Franciscan—a solitary outpost in a Moslem land—wrestles vainly with his first parish.

Luria tribe is of great interest, as here one sees Christianity disintegrating and giving way before advancing Islam, as history shows it has been slowly doing for the last four hundred years in these parts.

Luria consists of two hundred houses (average ten to a house). Of these now only twenty are Christian at all, and scarcely one wholly Christian—some, indeed, mainly Moslem, with a few Christian members.

Within the last five-and-thirty years, eleven whole houses have turned Turk, and members of very many others. A mosque is being built, and a Hodja had already arrived. The Franciscan was in despair. The Church, with curious apathy, let the whole district slip without making an effort till too late. Luria is in the diocese of Durazzo. The former Bishop, an Italian, had only Italian friars. By the time one knew the language, he was changed for another. And, till lately, there was no priest at all in Luria, save in the summer.

Islam all the time has kept on a steady propaganda. No persecution of any kind has taken place. All has been done by persuasion and heavy bribes. The beggarly methods of Christianity, compared with the open-handed liberality of Islam—the wretched hovel of the church and the new mosque—were enough alone to convince a quite ignorant people that the one was a dying, the other a living, cause.³⁰

Figures of Note

Nikollë Kaçorri

The Catholic political and nationalist figure, Dom Nikollë Kaçorri (1862–1917), was born in the village of Krej-Lura in the Lura tribal region. He trained for the priesthood in Troshan near Lezha and studied theology in Italy, being ordained as a Catholic priest. On his return to Albania in 1893, he began work as a parish priest in Durrës. In the early years of the twentieth century, Kaçorri was increasingly involved in the nationalist movement, and was one of the organisers of an armed uprising in Kurbin, Kruja and Mirdita in 1905–7. In 1906, as a man of the cloth, he was made protonotary apostolic, and later in life bore the ecclesiastical title of vicar general. In 1907, Kaçorri was a member of the nationalist *Vllaznia* (Brotherhood) society in Durrës and co-founded the *Bashkimi* (Unity) society in 1909. In November 1908, he took part in the Congress of Monastir, which was held to decide on an Albanian alphabet. In 1910, during an uprising in Kurbin in which he was involved, he was arrested by the Ottoman authorities for sedition and was sentenced to four years in prison, though the sentence was soon reduced to 13 months. In November 1912 he was present at the declaration of Albanian independence in Vlorë, as a representative of Durrës. There, he was made deputy prime minister in the first provisional government, but resigned in March 1913 after marked differences with Ismail Qemal bey Vlorë. Kaçorri left Albania at the end of 1913 or soon thereafter, and met Prince Wied (1876–1945) in Berlin in January 1914. On 28 February 1914, he was in Vienna with an Albanian deputation that was received by the Austrian Emperor at Schönbrunn Palace. He was to spend the rest of his life in Vienna. In April 1917, though increasingly ravaged by cancer, he took part in another Albanian deputation to pay homage to the Emperor in Vienna, but died two months later at the Fürth sanatorium. He was buried on 2 June 1917 at the Vienna Central Cemetery. Nikollë Kaçorri's remains were repatriated from Vienna to Tirana almost a century later, on 9 February 2011.

The Arrëni Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Arrëni (also spelled Arni, Arrni, Arnji and Arrnji) tribal region is situated in the southwestern corner of the District of Kukës in

northeastern Albania. It centres on the area between the eastern slopes of Mount Zeba and the left (western) bank of the Black Drin. Arrëni borders on the traditional tribal regions of Lura to the west, Dardha to the south, Luma to the east and northeast, and Fani in Mirdita to the northwest. The chief settlement of Arrëni is the village of Arrën.

Population

The term Arrëni was recorded as *Areni* in 1641 in the report of Marco Scura; and as *Arena* and *Areni* in 1703 in a report of the Catholic archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich.

The Arrëni were a wholly Muslim tribe, although there was once a church dedicated to Saint Barbara in Arrën.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

The Arrëni were a small tribe positioned geographically between three larger groupings, Luma, Dibra and Mirdita. Although they had close relations with all three, they were actually quite independent of them. They were traditionally more closely allied to Luma than to Dibra.

Nonetheless, Arrëni was not a tribal region in the sense of a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor. Like neighbouring Luma and Lura, Arrëni was an ethnographic region with a distinct history and identity.

Historically the Arrëni are said to have separated from the Berisha tribe. They were culturally related to the Catholic Mirdita and their women wore Mirdita dress.³¹ In 1854, Paolo Dodmassei, the Catholic Bishop of Sappa in Pulat, noted, for instance, that there were six Muslim families in Arrëni who had originally been Catholic. They had fled to the Muslim Arrëni tribe because of blood feuds in their original homeland and converted there to Islam.³²

Travel Impressions

Edith Durham visited Arrëni (Arnji) in 1908 and left the following impressions:

Fortune favoured. Our stable companions were a very pleasant Catholic and his servant, bound for Arnji, in the heart of the Moslem land, to start a shop. He was travelling under the *besa* of Arnji, with two packbeasts laden with salt, sugar, and coffee. We

should be safe with him, he said, under the double *besa* –the general one and the private and particular one of Arnji; and Arnji would give us safe-conduct on.

It was night. The full moon rose majestic, flooding the vale with mystic splendour. Somewhere out in 'that faeryland forlorn' lay Arnji. I did not stop to ask in which direction, but accepted the salt-and-sugar man's offer at once.

We retired to the stable, lit a fire in the middle, and I slumbered peacefully on hay, till waked by a horse, that had broken loose, eating it from under me.

We started very early. After this for three days the Austrian staff was useless. Its makers, I learnt afterwards, had not been through here, and had relied on imagination. I made such notes as I could, but even had I had the means of making a survey, it would have been too dangerous in a land where all strangers are suspect. [...]

Sroji [Surroj] gave us an old man as safe-conduct, and we started up the Lek Dukaghin range, a long and steep ascent through fine beech forest to the pass, Chafa Benks, at the top. This is unmapped, as is indeed the whole route. We descended a steep slope on the other side (rough above, and studded with bushes of sweet yellow plums, and cultivated below), and reached Arnji, a wide level, covered with well-irrigated maize fields, and scattered with good stone *kulas*.

Our salt-and-sugar friend led us straight to one of the largest, which stood in an enclosure with a second smaller house within it. Out came the whole household of staring, wondering people. The Head welcomed the Sugar man warmly, and looked at us with doubtful astonishment. I had been instructed to hold my tongue, and did so.

After explanations, he laughed at our coming, and said, had we not been brought by his good friend here, he would certainly not have admitted us, as the tribe wanted no strangers. As it was, we were his guests, and very welcome.

The women were sent in to make ready, and Marko and I were left alone, sitting on the ground outside. Time passed. Marko was depressed. It was not till the light was fading that we were summoned within to a large, very clean room, with an earthen

floor and a low ceiling. A pile of logs blazed on the hearth. I lay on sheepskins, and stretched blissfully in the grateful warmth, for evening brought a touch of autumn chill to the air. A dozen or so of men came in—fairish, with grey or hazel eyes—all friendly. Talk and tales went round. [...]

The women spread supper—a large bowl of cheese melted in butter, into which we dipped our maize bread, and very good it was. Then came the inevitable sour *kas*, followed by hand-washing, mouth-rinsing, and sweeping up of the crumbs. The whole was over in twenty minutes. Large stones were then set in the two loopholes that were the only windows, to make all safe for the night.

We lay down and slept on sheepskins. The women slept in another room. They were not veiled, and wore, like the Mirdite women, long cotton drawers, with knitted ankle pieces in red and white patterns, which show beneath the skirt; also Mirdite pattern earrings, and four or five large silver coins on a black cord round the neck.

Arnji is a small independent tribe that goes with Debra. I am told it is an offshoot of Berisha, but my men were fearful of arousing suspicion by asking questions for me. It is all Moslem now, but crosses stood in many maize fields.³³

The Composite Dibra Tribe

Location of Tribal Territory

The Dibra tribal region³⁴ is situated in the District of Dibra in eastern central Albania. It is located in the valley of the Black Drin River from Luma territory in the north down to the town of Dibra³⁵ in the south. Dibra borders on the traditional tribal regions of Lura and Mati to the west, Arrëni and Luma to the north, and non-tribal regions, some Slavic-speaking, to the east and south. The main settlements of Dibra are: the district capital Peshkopia in Albania and the town of Dibra in the Republic of Macedonia. Among the other settlements of Dibra (in Albania) are: Shupenza, Maqellara, Klenja, Zall-Dardha, Tomin, Kastriot, Zerqan and Muhurr.

Population

The term Dibra, referring primarily to the region, occurs in ancient Greek as *Δεύπρακος* and in Latin as *Deborus*. We encounter the

toponym as *Debrè*, *episcopo Debre* in 1107;³⁶ as *colonum Debrae* in 1223;³⁷ as *contrata de Deber* in 1308;³⁸ as *Debre* in the *Anonymi Descriptio Europae Orientalis* in 1308; as *Debri* in an Ottoman document in 1466; as *Debria*, *Dibra*, *Dibra Bassa* 'Lower Dibra' in the Breve memoria of Giovanni Musachi in 1515; as *Dibra* on the 1593 map of the Flemish cartographer Cornelis de Jode; and as *Diberi*, *Dibra* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola.

The Dibra tribe is actually a geographical grouping of quite a few small tribes in the valley of the Black Drin. These tribes are found primarily, but not solely, on the left (western) side of the river.

Tribal Legendry, Ancestry and History

Like Mati, Dibra is not a tribal region in the sense of a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor. It was and is an ethnographic region with a distinct history and identity that acted as a military unit in times of conflict, in the sense of a *bajrak*. In his demographic study of the Albanian tribes in 1918, Franz Seiner included 12 groupings in Dibra that he regarded as tribes: the Reçi, the Dardha, the Ploshtani, the Trojaku, the Çidhna, the Kastrioti, the Muhurri, the Luznia, the Zogjaj, the Skandëri (Homeshi), the Dervishaj (Krajka) and the Sheh Hysenaj (Zerqani).

Dibra has a long history as a border region between Albania and Macedonia. For the Albanians, it is the homeland of the national hero, Scanderbeg (1405–68), who revolted against the Ottoman Empire and held the sultans at bay for many years. Dibra was divided when Serbian troops invaded, conquered and devastated the region during and after the First Balkan War (1912–13). The largest town, Dibra, became part of Yugoslavia and is now in the Republic of Macedonia, whereas the rest of the region remained in Albania. Despite the amnesty proclaimed by King Peter I of Serbia on 7 September 1913, the carnage continued and most of the tribes of Dibra were decimated. An 'Official Report to the Great Powers' published in December 1913, detailed for Homesh, for instance:

In Homesh, only three of the 150 houses originally standing in the village remained. All the others were torched after having been pillaged. After the village surrendered, the Serbs killed: Musa

Ismajli, Shemsedin Bajrami and Halit Sulejmani who had returned to the village after the amnesty. The first time, they took 1,000 head of sheep, 150 head of cattle and 40 horses. The second time, they took 50 head of sheep, nine head of cattle and nine horses. In Shupenza, after robbing the houses and taking all the valuables and supplies, the Serbs massacred: Ali Myslimi and his brother Abdi, Hasan Abazi and Dalip Elmazi. In Okshatina, only one house remains intact of the original 74. They were all pillaged and torched. Two men called Ferhat and Nazif were bayoneted. All the animals were carried off. In Topojan, a village of 68 homes, there was general plundering and burning. A man called Abdullah Xhaferri had his throat slit as he was not able to come up with the sum of five Turkish lira (115 Italian lira), the ransom demanded by the Serb officer commanding the detachment. The Serb soldiers carried off all the animals. In Çerenec, they torched 23 houses and massacred Hasan Abazi and his wife, Ramadan Salihu and Rrustem Sulejmani. They pillaged the whole village and carried off all valuables, supplies and animals.³⁹

Figures of Note

Scanderbeg

The real name of Scanderbeg (1405–68) or Skanderbeg (Alb. *Skënderbeu*) was George Castriotta (Alb. *Gjergj Kastrioti*). George Castriotta stemmed from a family of landowners from the Dibra region who were no doubt of mixed Albanian–Slavic ancestry. His father John Castriotta had initially submitted to Ottoman rule but, after the Battle of Ankara in 1402, he declared his independence from the Turks, extending his influence from Dibra through the Mat valley to the Adriatic. According to legend, as a pledge of his submission, John Castriotta sent his sons, Stanisha, Reposh, Constantine and George, in ransom to the sultan's court at Adrianople (Edirne) in 1423. It was here that George was made a court page, received military training, was converted to Islam and took the name Alexander (Iskander). For his military valour, Iskander was awarded the title of bey (*beg*), and thus the name Scanderbeg by which he was to be universally known. In 1432, having gained the confidence of Sultan Murad II (reg. 1421–51), he was appointed *subaşı* (captain) of the fortress of Kruja (Croia), replacing the former commander Hizir Bey.

Scanderbeg's father was poisoned by the sultan in 1437 and Scanderbeg expected to take over his land and inheritance, but was instead deprived of them and abruptly exiled. At some point in this period he seems to have made the acquaintance of John Hunyadi (ca. 1387–1456), the leader of Hungarian resistance to the Ottomans. The murder of his father meant, in Albanian customary law, that Scanderbeg was obliged to take revenge on the sultan, and the military success of the Hungarians convinced him that the time was now ripe to abandon Ottoman forces. In the spring of 1443, Sultan Murad attacked Ibrahim of Karaman in Anatolia, taking his favourite son, Alaeddin Ali Çelebi, with him. The sultan was victorious but his beloved son perished, strangled by a courtier. Recent evidence, uncovered by historian Oliver Schmitt, shows that Scanderbeg was the prime mover behind the plot to kill the sultan's son. He had avenged the death of his father in an eminently Albanian manner.

An opportunity for open revolt against the sultan then arose during the Battle of Nish (Niš) in November 1443 when Turkish troops were in disarray after a Hungarian offensive. Scanderbeg, his nephew Hamza (son of Reposh), and 300 horsemen abandoned Turkish forces and returned to Dibra, whence they carried on to the fortress of Kruja. Within a matter of days, Scanderbeg had assembled his own Albanian forces for a general uprising. The fortresses of Petrela, south of Tirana, and Svetigrad in Dibra were soon taken by the Albanians. On 2 March 1444, Scanderbeg convened an assembly of all important Albanian nobles at Lezha (Alessio) during which it was decided to set up a standing army to counter an impending Turkish invasion. Scanderbeg was selected to head this force of about 15,000 men. A large Turkish army soon flooded into Albania but was beaten back in Dibra at the end of June 1444. Two further Ottoman invasions were repelled, one in October 1445 on the Mokra Plateau near Pogradec, and a second in September 1446 in Dibra. In May 1450, Sultan Murad II arrived personally at Kruja and besieged the fortress for four and a half months. Although overwhelmingly outnumbered, the Albanians managed to resist Turkish forces and conferred a humiliating defeat upon the sultan, who was obliged on 26 October to return to Adrianople empty-handed. Scanderbeg's victory over the Muslim hordes was widely acclaimed in the Christian world. Pope Nicholas V (reg. 1447–55), King Ladislaus V of Hungary (reg. 1444–57), and King Alfonso of

Aragon-Naples (reg. 1435–58) sent messages of congratulations and offered Scanderbeg their support.

The alliance of Albanian nobles that Scanderbeg had cemented in Lezha in March 1444 began to break up. The Dukagjini, Arianiti and Balsha families withdrew their support and even Scanderbeg's commander Moisi Golemi and Scanderbeg's nephew Hamza abandoned him. Scanderbeg nonetheless carried on and repulsed two Turkish invasions in 1456 and 1457. For his defence of Christendom against the Muslim hordes, Pope Calixtus II (reg. 1455–8) awarded the Albanian warrior the title of *Athleta Christi*.

In 1466, Sultan Mehmed II himself arrived in Albania with a large army, and laid siege to Kruja. After two months of siege, the sultan was forced to return to Turkey and left his troops under the command of Balaban Pasha. In July 1467, Mehmed II returned to Albania, this time with even more forces, determined to bring Scanderbeg to his knees. The Albanian leader requested assistance from Venice and called for a new assembly of nobles in Lezha in January 1468. On 17 January 1468, however, before the assembly could convene, the heroic Scanderbeg died, and resistance to the Turks soon collapsed. Albania was to return to Ottoman rule for another four and a half centuries.

Elez Isufi

The nationalist figure, Elez Isufi (1861–1924), also called Elez Isufi Ndreu, was born in the village of Sllova in the Dibra region. He and his guerrilla band resisted Serbian troops in 1912. A close ally of Bajram bey Curri (1862–1925), Isufi led an armed uprising in Dibra on 15 August 1921 to free the region of Serbian forces. The fighting continued up to December 1921. He was involved in a further uprising on 1 March 1922 against the regime of Ahmet Zogu (1895–1961), and his Dibran fighters were able to cross the mountains and take Tirana. He took the side of Fan Noli (1882–1965) during the so-called Democratic Revolution and was killed by Yugoslav troops at the end of 1924. Elez Isufi was the father of Cen Elezi (1884–1949), a resistance fighter of World War II.

Fiqri bey Dine

Fiqri bey Dine (1897–1960) was a political and military figure of the World War II period. Born in Maqellara in the Dibra region, he attended

school in Dibra and studied at a military cadet college in Wels, Austria. He returned to Albania in 1918 as the tribal leader of his region and took part in the reorganisation of the gendarmerie as a district commander. Dine took the side of Ahmet Zogu in 1924 and, in support of Zogist forces, seized Tirana with 600 Dibran fighters in December of that year. In the following years, he was in the circle of Zogu's most trusted officers. In 1928, he was made commander of the Tirana battalion and was later regiment commander in Berat. In 1936 he was army inspector at the royal court of King Zog and in 1938 was commander of the gendarmerie. Dine served as minister of the interior in the short-lived cabinet of Eqrem bey Libohova (1882–1948) from 18 January to 11 February 1943, but was distrusted by the Italians for his nationalism. During World War II, Italian forces are said to have burned down his sumptuous four-storey manor in his native Dibra region. Dine assisted German forces in an offensive against the partisans in Dibra in late 1943, but is said to have discreetly informed the other side of the German approach. On 17 July 1944, he became prime minister and minister of the interior in what was described as a moderately Zogist government, but because of the chaotic civil war situation, he resigned five weeks later, on 28 August 1944. Fiqri bey Dine managed to get out of Albania during the communist takeover. In mid-October 1944, he fled from Shkodra to Brindisi in southern Italy on a little fishing boat with leading members of Balli Kombëtar and died in Brussels in 1960.

CHAPTER 11

MINOR ALBANIAN TRIBES

The Bobi Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Bobi was located in the District of Shkodra in northern Albania in what is now Shala tribal territory, specifically in the settlements of Nicaj and Bob i Shalës (now abandoned), and around Nënnavriq. The term Bobi occurs as *Bobi* in the 1671–2 report of the apostolic visitor to Albania, Pietro Stefano Gaspari, and (erroneously) as *Robbi* on the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli. According to oral tradition, the Bobi originally stemmed from Bushat or Shiroka near Shkodra, but moved into the interior at a relatively early period, as they were in the mountains before the arrival of the Shala.¹ Pietro Stefano Gaspari, who travelled through the region in 1671–2, reported: ‘The village of Bobi has 13 homes and 58 souls. It has two churches, one dedicated to the Assumption and the other to Saint Nicholas. Both of them are built of stone walls and are in a good condition, but without vestments.’ As opposed to the surrounding Shala who increased in numbers over the years, the Bobi remained a small tribe. In 1905, almost two and a half centuries later, they still had only 13 homes.² Under pressure from the Shala, most of the Bobi tribe was forced southwards to Berisha, Bugjoni and Thaçi tribal lands in the Puka region, specifically to the villages of Fierza and Kokëdoda. This apparently occurred before the arrival of the Thaçi, i.e. before 1600, with whom they later had close relations.³ Their ancestral father here was one Kol Deti (Kolë Dedi) who was related somehow to Murr Deti, the oldest ancestor of Berisha.

A few households of Bobi still remain in Shala, and there are several families around Kokëdoda, but the Bobi largely disintegrated as a tribe a century ago.

The Boksi Tribe

The Boksi or Bokshi were a small *bajrak* in what was otherwise Drishti tribal territory in the Postripa area, i.e. the lower valley of the Kir River northeast of Shkodra. The main settlements of the Boksi were Boks (Kodra e Boksit), Dragoç, Mes, Myselim and Rrashi i Vorfës. In his demographic study of the Albanian tribes in 1918, Franz Seiner regarded Boksi as a tribe of its own right. He gave the population statistics of Boksi at the time as 158 households with a total of 1,498 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Boks, Deraj, Dragoç, Mes, Myselim, Rrash and Vorfa.⁴

The Buza e Ujit Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Buza e Ujit (meaning 'waterside') was situated in the District of Malësia e Madhe of northern Albania. They lived to the west of Koplik around the mouth of the Proni i thatë (Dry Creek) along the shores of Lake Shkodra. In his demographic study of the Albanian tribes in 1918, Franz Seiner regarded Buza e Ujit as a tribe of its own, although their territory is an entirely lowland region. He gave the population statistics of Buza e Ujit at the time as 201 households with a total of 675 inhabitants, of whom ca. 500 were Muslim and the rest Catholic.⁵ The main settlements of Buza e Ujit are: Kamica, Flaka (now Kamicë-Flaka) and Jubica. It is said that the Buza e Ujit originally came from the area around Podgorica in Montenegro.⁶

The Çidhna Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Çidhna (also spelled Qidhna) is situated in the northern part of the District of Dibra in eastern Albania, on the left (western) and right (eastern) banks of the Black Drin River. Çidhna borders on the traditional tribal regions of Dardha and Lura across the Black Drin to the west, Ploshtani and Trojaku to the northeast, and Muhurri and Kastrioti to the south. The main settlements of Çidhna are:

Arras, Kodër-Leshja, Fushë-Çidhna (formerly Fushë Alie) and Çidhna e Poshtme.

The term Çidhna is recorded historically as *Chidina* in 1641 in the report of Marco Scura; as *Chidina* around 1685 in the report of Giorgio Stampaneo, as *Chidena superiore* and *Chidena inferiore* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola; and as *Cidena* in the 1866 memoir of French diplomat Emile Wiet.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Çidhna tribe were as follows: 268 households with a total of 1,338 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Arras, Mustafaj and Sina.⁷ Çidhna was part of the composite Dibra tribe.

The Dardha Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Dardha is situated in the northern part of the District of Dibra in northeastern Albania. It is located on the left (western) bank of the Black Drin River. Dardha borders on the traditional tribal regions of Reçi to the north, Luma and Ploshtani to the east, Lura to the west, and Trojaku to the southeast. The main settlements of Dardha are Zall-Dardha, Lashkiza and Tartaj.

The term Dardha is thought to be related to the Albanian word *dardbë*, *dardba* (pear). It is a common toponym and there are settlements in various parts of Albania with this name: Dardha in Berat, Dardha in Korça, Dardha in Librazhd, Dardha in Puka, Dardhas in Pogradec, Dardhaj in Mirdita, and Dardhës in Përmet. The ancient term Dardania may also be related to this root. Dardha in Dibra occurs as *Darda* in 1671 in the ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari when it consisted of 130 inhabitants, and as *Darda* on the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli.⁸

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Dardha tribe were as follows: 229 households with a total of 1,198 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Lashkiza, Tartaj and Zall-Dardha.⁹

Dardha, although usually seen as part of the composite Dibra tribe, was often also considered to be a *bajrak* of Lura.

The Dervishaj Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Dervishaj, also known as Krajka, is situated in the District of Bulqiza in eastern Albania. It is located between the towns of Bulqiza and Dibra. Dervishaj borders on the traditional tribal regions of Zogjaj and Skandëri to the north, and Sheh Hysenaj to the south, the Slavic-speaking Golloborda region to the southeast, and the Mat region to the west. The main settlements of Dervishaj are: Peladhia, Godvija, Krajka and Sofraçan.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Dervishaj tribe were as follows: 150 households with a total of 995 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Krajka, Godvija, Sofraçan (Karmishta) and Peladhia.¹⁰ Dervishaj was part of the composite Dibra tribe.

The Dushi Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Dushi is located on the banks of the Drin River just below the present Koman dam and power station, in the Districts of Shkodra and Puka in northern Albania. It is part of what are otherwise the tribal territories of Shoshi and Qerreti. The main settlements of Dushi are Karma, Palaj (now Palaj-Gushta) and Dush. They were a Catholic tribe. The term was recorded as *Dusci* in 1671 in the ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari and on the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli. The latter refers to the settlements of *Dusci superiore* (Upper Dush) and *Dusci inferiore* (Lower Dush).

The Dushi tribe derived its ancestry from a figure called Geg who stemmed from Karma. In oral tradition, it is said that Geg was out hunting on Mount Guri i Sokolit with his brother one day when he caught a falcon alive, which he subsequently presented as a gift to a local prince, said in some versions of the legend to be Lekë Dukagjini. The prince was impressed by Geg's skill and generosity and, in return for the gift, gave him as much land as he could ride around in one day. Geg thus mounted his horse and rode around the land that presently forms Dushi territory. A saga of this type, for example riding around a circumference of land to take possession of it, is also known to the Kastrati. Geg of Dushi had one son called Kolë Gega

and four grandsons called Meksh Kola, Zef Kola, Mark Kola and Losh Kola. Baron Nopcsa dated the legend of Geg and the falcon to around the year 1590.¹¹

The Gimaj Tribe

The Gimaj tribal region is situated in the District of Shkodra in northern Albania as part of what is now Shala tribal territory. Their main village, called Gimaj, is located on the right (western) side of the Shala River to the northwest of the village of Nënnavriq (formerly Dakaj). Other minute Gimaj settlements include Camaj, Xhaferaj, Marvataj, Kodër Limaj, Rrogam, Radoja and Pjeshullaj. The Gimaj are normally considered part of Shala, but in his demographic study of the Albanian tribes in 1918, Franz Seiner regarded Gimaj as a tribe of its own. He gave the population statistics of Gimaj at the time as: 103 households with a total of 565 inhabitants, all of whom were Catholic.¹² As late as the 1950s, elderly Shala men, when asked, would state that the Gimaj were not of the same tribe as Shala and say: 'We live and work together with the Gimaj but we are not brothers.' It is likely that the Gimaj moved into the Shala Valley from Plan to the west, and originally constituted a *bajrak* of their own.¹³

The Grizha Tribe

The small tribe (*bajrak*) of Grizha is situated in the District of Malësia e Madhe on the right (northern) side of the Rrjoll River where it reaches the plain of Shkodra, half way between Shkodra and Koplik. It borders on the traditional tribal regions of Reçi to the north, Rrjolli to the east, and the plain of Shkodra to the west. The settlement existed in 1416 when it was mentioned in the Venetian Catasto di Scutari as having 39 households. Grizha is recorded as *Grisca* on the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli.¹⁴ It formed one *bajrak* including Gruemira. In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Grizha tribe were given as follows: 130 households with a total of 1,044 inhabitants, the vast majority of whom were Muslims.¹⁵ The French consul Hyacinthe Hecquard left the following description of Grizha:

In a large valley on the southern slope of Mount Privas between lands belonging to Rrjolli and Kopliku are the small tribes of Grizha and Gruemira, whose two villages have a total of 69 households and 900 inhabitants. They once formed a single *bajrak*. Most of them profess the Mohammedan religion, and the few Christian families living among them are of the same race and have the same customs and costumes. As with the Rrjolli, the land they occupy is rocky and barren, but offers some good pastureland. The inhabitants use the limestone ground to make lime that is reputed to be the best in the province and is very much sought after in Shkodra.¹⁶

The Kastrioti Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Kastrioti is situated in the District of Dibra in eastern Albania, on the right (eastern) side of the Black Drin River. It is located about ten kilometres northwest of the town of Peshkopia. Kastrioti borders on the traditional tribal regions of Trojaku to the north, Çidhna to the west, and Muhurri to the southwest. The main settlements of Kastrioti are Kastriot, Fushë-Kastriot and Sohodoll.

The Kastrioti tribe bears the name of the Albanian national hero Gjergj Castriota Scanderbeg who stemmed from this region. Kastrioti was part of the composite Dibra tribe.

The Komani Tribe

The Komani tribal region is located on the banks of the Drin River around the present Koman dam and power station in the Districts of Shkodra and Puka in northern Albania. It is part of what are otherwise the tribal territories of Shoshi and Qerreti. The Komani are said to stem from the region on the right (western) side of the Zeta River valley, south of Danilovgrad and northwest of Podgorica in Montenegro where there is a Montenegrin Komani tribe. At some point in time they moved southwards and settled around Qerret i Poshtër (now Qerret i Vogël) in what is otherwise Qerreti tribal territory in the District of Puka. Situated on traditional Komani territory is the archaeological site of the fortress of Delmaca (Kalaja e Delmacës) that dates back to Illyrian times. The toponym Komani occurs as *Comani* in 1629 in the ecclesiastical

report of Giezzi Bianco, and as *Comani* in 1703 in a report of the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich. Like the Bobi, the Komani largely disintegrated as a tribe a century ago.¹⁷

The Kopliku Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Kopliku is centred on the town of Koplik in the District of Malësia e Madhe in northern Albania. Kopliku bordered on the traditional tribal lands of Kastrati to the north, Rrjollli to the northeast, Reçi to the east, Grizha to the southeast, Buza e Ujit to the west and the lowlands of Shkodra to the south. The Slavic toponym from which the tribe derived its name occurs as *Cupelnich* around 1200 in the work of Presbyter Diocleas; *Kupêlnik* in 1348; *Copenico* in 1416; *Chopilich* in 1614 in the report of the Venetian writer Mariano Bolizza; *Coppilico* on the 1688 map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli; *Coplico* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola; and as *Copelico* in the 1703 report of the Catholic Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Vincentius Zmajevich.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Kopliku tribe were given as follows: 208 households with a total of 1,455 inhabitants, the vast majority of whom were Muslims.¹⁸ It was a heterogeneous tribal region composed at times of three *bajraks*: Kopliku i Sipërm (Upper Kopliku), Kopliku i Poshtëm (Lower Kopliku), and Grizha and Gruemira. As a lowland region, the population lived more off farming than herding. There were also numerous Slavic settlements in the surroundings.¹⁹

The Luznia Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Luznia is situated in the District of Dibra in eastern Albania. It is located on the left (western) side of the Black Drin River and stretches from Hotesh up to the Muhurr River. Luznia borders on the traditional tribal regions of Muhurri to the north, Zogaj and Skandëri to the south, and the Mat region to the west. The main settlements of Luznia are: the local administrative centre Lishan i Poshtëm, as well as Lishan i Epërm, Hotesh, Arapaj i Epërm, Arapaj i Poshtëm and Katundi i Ri.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Luznia tribe

were as follows: 258 households with a total of 1,415 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Hotesh, Lishan and Luznia e Epër.²⁰ Luznia was part of the composite Dibra tribe.

The Mëgulla Tribe

The small tribe (*bajrak*) of Mëgulla is situated in the District of Shkodra in northern Albania. It is located on the right (western) side of the upper Kir River valley in the mountainous and isolated Pulat region. Mëgulla borders on the traditional tribal lands of Plani to the north, Shala to the east, Xhani to the south, and Shkreli and Rrjoli to the west. The main settlement of Mëgulla is the little village of Mëgulla. Further to the south was Mount Mëgulla (Mali i Mëgullës). This Slavic toponym, no doubt related to the Slavic *mogula* > 'grave, tomb,' was recorded as *Megula* in 1638 in a report by Frang Bardhi (Francesco Bianchi); *Mongulla* in 1671 in the ecclesiastical report of Pietro Stefano Gaspari; *Mogulla* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola; and *Mengula* in 1703 in a report of the Catholic archbishop of Bar [Antivari] Vincentius Zmajevich.

The Mëgulla, an entirely Catholic tribe, were largely regarded as part of the Plani tribe with which they had, at any rate, close ties. According to legendry, the ancestral father of the Mëgulla was Gjergj Gabeti, who was the younger brother of Can Gabeti, the ancestral father of the Shllaku tribe.²¹

The Morina Tribe

The Morina were a small tribe located in the highlands of Gjakova along the present Albania–Kosovo border. Morina tribal territory bordered on the traditional tribal lands of Gashi to the west, Bytyçi to the southwest and Hasi to the south. The present border post between Albania and Kosovo, known as Qafë Morinë (Morina Pass), is on Morina territory, but the Morina subsequently settled in various parts of Kosovo, in particular in Gjakova, Kamenica and Gjilan. They seem to trace their origin from Mirdita. The Morina were a tribe in the sense of a *fis*, i.e. a community that is aware of common blood ties and of a common history reaching back to one male ancestor.

The Muhurri Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Muhurri is situated in the District of Dibra in eastern Albania, on the left (western) side of the Black Drin River. It is located about ten kilometres west of the town of Peshkopia. Muhurri borders on the traditional tribal regions of Çidhna and Lura to the north, and Kastrioti to the east. The main settlements of Muhurri are Fushë-Muhurr, Hurdhë-Muhurr and Vajmëdhej.

The term Muhurri is recorded historically as *Muhuri* and *Muhurri* in 1641 in the report of Marco Scura; and as *Muchbriri* on the 1689 map of the Italian cartographer Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Muhurri tribe were as follows: 236 households with a total of 1,304 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Muhurr and Vajmëdhej.²² Muhurri was part of the composite Dibra tribe.

The Ploshtani Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Ploshtani is situated in the northeastern part of the District of Dibra in northeastern Albania, on the right (eastern) side of the Black Drin River. It is located more specifically on the right (northern) bank of the Veleshica River, which is a tributary of the Black Drin, and on the western side of Mount Sarakoli (2,204 m.). Ploshtani borders on the traditional tribal regions of Luma to the north, Reçi and Dardha across the Black Drin River to the west and Trojaku to the south. The main settlement of Ploshtani is Ploshtan. The term Ploshtani is Slavic and means a 'bald patch of land'. Ploshtani is part of the composite Dibra tribe, but has also often been considered a *bajrak* of Luma.

The Reçi Tribe of Dibra

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Reçi²³ in Dibra is situated in the northernmost part of the District of Dibra in northeastern Albania. It is located on the left (western) and to a lesser extent on the right (eastern) bank of the Black Drin River. Reçi borders on the traditional tribal regions of Arrëni to the north, Luma and Ploshtani to the east, Dardha and Muhurri to the south, and Lura to the west. The main settlements of Reçi are: Gurrë-

Reç, Zall-Reç, Hurdhë-Reç, Draj-Reç and Bardhaj-Reç. The term Reçi was recorded as in 1641 as *Reçi* in the report of Marco Scura.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Reçi tribe of the Dibra region were as follows: 239 households with a total of 1,429 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of: Bardhaj i Reçit, Draj i Reçit, Gur i Reçit, and Kraj i Reçit.²⁴

Reçi is the northernmost part of the composite Dibra tribes. It was, however, at times regarded as a *bajrak* of Lura.

The Sheh Hysenaj Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Sheh Hysenaj, also known as Zerqani, is situated in the District of Bulqiza in eastern Albania. It is located between the towns of Bulqiza and Dibra. Sheh Hysenaj borders on the traditional tribal region of Dervishaj close to the north and the Slavic-speaking Golloborda region to the south. The main settlements of Sheh Hysenaj are Zerqan, Sopot and Strikçan.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Sheh Hysenaj tribe were as follows: 305 households with a total of 1,760 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Gurishta (now Sopot), Sheh-Hysenaj (now Zerqan), and Thatusha (now Strikçan).²⁵ Sheh Hysenaj was part of the composite Dibra tribe.

The Skandëri Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Skandëri, also called Homeshi, is situated in the District of Bulqiza in eastern Albania. It is located on the left (western) side of the Black Drin River, on the slopes of Mount Homesh (Mali i Homeshit) about ten kilometres west of the town of Dibra. Skandëri borders on the traditional tribal regions of Zogjaj to the north, Dervishaj to the southwest, and the Slavic-speaking Golloborda region to the south. The main settlements of Skandëri are: Çerenec, Shupenza, Boçeva, Homesh, Okshatina and Topojan.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Skandëri tribe were as follows: 612 households with a total of 2,773 inhabitants. This

comprised the settlements and surroundings of Bukureshti i Madh (Garica), Bukureshti i Vogël, Kuglosh (now Boçeva), Mirosh (now Okshatina), Skandëri (Homesh), Sukth (now Çerenec), Ujth (Shupenza), Urnaj (Topojan) and Vlashaj.²⁶ Skandëri was part of the composite Dibra tribe.

The Trojaku Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Trojaku is situated in the northern part of the District of Dibra in northeastern Albania, on the right (eastern) bank of the Black Drin River. It is located on the western side of White Mountain (Mali i Bardhë, 1,961 m.). Trojaku borders on the traditional tribal regions of Ploshtani to the north, Kastrioti to the south, and Çidhna to the west. The main settlement of Trojaku is Trojak. Trojaku was part of the composite Dibra tribe.

The Ura e Shtrejtë Tribe

The small tribe (*bajrak*) of Ura e Shtrejtë (sometimes written erroneously as Ura e Shtrenjtë), meaning 'narrow bridge', is situated in the District of Shkodra in northern Albania. It is located on the left (southern) side of the Kir River valley in the mountainous Pulat region. It consisted of one settlement of the same name, Ura e Shtrejtë, with a population of about 360 in the early twentieth century. The 'narrow bridge' in question was a 4–5 metre wooden construction over a deep torrent. The term occurs as *Vraestrent* on the map of the Venetian cartographer Francesco Maria Coronelli in 1688. As a very small tribe and the last Muslim settlement in the Kir River valley, it had close ties with the Drishti and Kiri tribes and then gradually came to lose its specific tribal identity.

The Zogjaj Tribe

The tribe (*bajrak*) of Zogjaj is situated in the District of Dibra in eastern Albania, on the left (western) side of the Black Drin River. It is located about 15 kilometres to the southwest of the town of Peshkopia. Zogjaj borders on the traditional tribal regions of Luznia to the north, Skandëri and Dervishaj to the south, and the Mat region the west. The main settlements of Zogjaj are Zogjaj, Stushaj, Bllaca, Mazhica and Gjuras.

In the first reliable census taken in Albania in 1918 under Austro-Hungarian administration, the population statistics of the Zogjaj tribe were as follows: 434 households with a total of 1,656 inhabitants. This comprised the settlements and surroundings of Dushkaj (now Stushaj), Gjuras, Gurra e mirë, Qafaz (now Mazhica), Rrunja (now Bllaca), and Zogjaj.²⁷ Zogjaj was part of the composite Dibra tribe.

GLOSSARY

anas

‘native, ancient, original inhabitants’. The term *anas* occurs often in northern Albanian tribal legendry for the original inhabitants of the region settled by a tribe. The word may be related to standard Alb. *anë*, def. *ana* ‘side’, in the sense of people who were sidelined. In most cases, the *anas* population continued to live side by side with the newcomers and came to form part of the tribe.

bajrak

‘tribe’. Standard Alb. *bajrak*, def. *bajraku* ‘tribe, banner’. A *bajrak* was a ‘tribe’ in the sense of a collectivity of individuals united under one banner and with a specific tribal territory. The term *bajrak*, also *bayrak*, which stems from Turkish *bayrak* ‘banner, standard’, is occasionally confused with the term *fis* (q.v.) which refers to a tribe in terms of blood relations and ancestry. Usually, all the men of one *bajrak* belonged to the same *fis*, but there were cases of a *bajrak* being made up of several *fis*, or of several tribes banding together to form one united *bajrak* for defence purposes. A *bajrak* could and usually did constitute a tribe of its own, but several *bajraks* could also unite to form a tribe. For instance, the original five *bajraks* of Mirdita formed the one large Mirdita tribe. A *bajrak* was, at any rate, usually associated with a specific tribal territory. It could be composed of several *mihalla* (q.v.) ‘neighbourhoods or hamlets’ or of several *vllazni* (q.v.) ‘brotherhoods’. There were about 150 *bajraks* in northern Albania in the early twentieth century.

bajraktar

‘chief of a tribe’. Standard Alb. *bajraktar*, def. *bajraktari* ‘tribal leader, banner chief, standard bearer’. The *bajraktar* was the military head of a *bajrak* (q.v.), usually being responsible for defence and military affairs. He could also oversee obedience to tribal laws and deal with issues that affected the *bajrak* as a whole. The position of *bajraktar* was often inherited from father to son or the next male heir, but in some cases the *bajraktar* was elected by the tribal elders. In some tribes, the *bajraktar* had little power or prestige at all, and was not necessarily regarded as a tribal leader. Most essentially, the *bajraktar* was the figure who led the fighters of his *bajrak* into battle. This he did by calling the forces of the tribe together with a warcry (*kushtrim*), being the only figure permitted to do so, and by raising the tribal standard to set off into battle.

bark

‘children of one family’. Standard Alb. *bark*, def. *barku*, plur. *barqe* ‘brood’, refers to all the (male) children of one mother and father. In the more general sense, a *bark* is thus a term for the descendants of a family. Several *barqe* make up a *vllazni* (q.v.).

besa

‘word of honour, treaty, cease-fire’. Standard Alb. *besë*, def. *besa* ‘word of honour’. The *besa* was an oath, promise or truce that could be concluded between parties to end fighting or a feud, or to provide safe passage.

bey

The Turkish title of *bey* referred in Ottoman times to a feudal lord or local ruler.

djelmnia

‘young tribal leaders’. Gheg Alb. *djelmni*, def. *djelmnia*, standard Alb. *djemuri*, def. *djemuria* ‘youth, boys’. *Djelmnia* was a collective term for

the young tribal leaders or youth of a tribe. The institution of the *djelmnia* arose in particular in Shala, when the young tribal leaders under Mehmet Shpendi opposed the authority of the *bajraktar* (q.v.) whom they felt was representing Ottoman interests. They acted to ensure the application of tribal law (the *kanun*) over Ottoman legislation. The word is related to standard Alb. *djalë*, def. *djali*, plur. *djem* 'youth, boy'.

Dukagjin

Region of northern central Albania. The term usually refers to the mountains east of Shkodra and north of the Drin River, i.e. Shala, Shoshi, Shllaku, Toplana, and as far east as Tropoja. According to tradition, the Dukagjini tribes consisted of Pulat, Shala, Shoshi, Dushmani, Toplana, Nikaj and Mërturi. However, the region of Puka and Berisha, south of the Drin River, was also considered part of Dukagjin and was once referred to as *Dukagjini i Vjetër* (Old Dukagjin). In Kosovo, the term Dukagjin usually refers to western Kosovo, broadly equivalent to the BCS term Metohija, i.e. the populated plateau running from Istog and Peja in the north down almost to Prizren in the south. This region is known more accurately as *Rrafshi i Dukagjinit* (the Dukagjin Plateau) to distinguish it from Dukagjin proper in the northern mountains. The term originally referred to the mediaeval Dukagjini family, whose homeland was between Lezha and the Fan River. This word is said to derive from *duka* 'duke' and *Gjin* 'John', i.e. Duke John, but this may be a folk etymology.

fis

'tribe'. Standard Alb. *fis*, def. *fisi* 'tribe, ethnic group, relatives, nobles'. A *fis* was a tribe in the sense of a collectivity of individuals who saw themselves as descended in patrilineage (male line) from one common male ancestor. The term is not to be confused with the *bajrak* (q.v.), which had more to do with a tribe in the sense of territory and defence. Since the members of a *fis* regarded themselves as blood-related, i.e. as brothers and sisters, they did not intermarry within the *fis*, however distantly the actual relationship on the male side (the 'blood line') may have been. The proximity of family relationships on the female side

(the so-called ‘milk line’) did not count because the tribes believe that there was no blood relationship through women. A *fis* could sometimes be composed of several *bajraks* and marriage was only permitted between them if they were not inter-related. Oral tradition speaks of the ‘twelve tribes (*fis*) of the northern mountains’ although there does not seem to be any agreement on which 12 tribes these were. Most often mentioned are: Kelmendi, Kastrati, Hoti, Gruda, Shkreli, Gashi, Krasniqja, Bytyçi, Berisha, Thaçi, Morina and Kabashi, but Shala and Shoshi also occur in this list. Oral tradition also speaks of the northern tribes as the 12 mountains: Triepshi, Piperi, Kuçi, Vasojeviçi, Kelmendi, Hoti, Gruda, Shkreli, Kastrati, Krasniqja, Gashi and Bytyçi.

Gheg

‘northern Albanian’. Standard Alb. *gegë*, def. *gega* ‘Gheg’. The term Gheg refers to the northern Albanians, i.e., all Albanians living north of the Shkumbin River and speaking Gheg dialects. The territory of the Ghegs is poetically referred to as Gegëria or Gegnia – Gheg Alb. *Gegni*, def. *Gegnja*, standard Alb. *Gegëri*, def. *Gegëria*. The term is usually spelled with an ‘h’ in English to preserve the hard ‘g’ pronunciation. The southern Albanians are called Tosks (q.v.). Scholar Rrok Zojzi suggests that the term Gheg originally referred only to the inhabitants of northern central Albania, between the Shkumbin and the Drin rivers, i.e. Mat, Mirdita, Puka and Dibra etc., rather than of the northern Alps.

gjakmarrje

‘blood feud, vendetta’. Standard Alb. *gjakmarrje*, def. *gjakmarrja* ‘blood-taking, blood feud’. The term derives from Albanian *gjak* ‘blood’ and *marrje* ‘taking’.

hise

‘offspring of a patrilineal line’. *Hise* refers to a married son (together with wife and children) who lives with his parents. Several *bise*, i.e. sons and their families, make up a *bark* (q.v.).

kaimakam

A local Turkish governor or mayor in Ottoman Albania. The term stems from Ottoman Turkish *kaymakam*, a representative of the government or state at the local level.

kanun

Code of consuetudinal or customary law, originally handed down orally from generation to generation. The Alb. term *kanun*, def. *kanuni*, is derived from Turkish *kanun* 'rule, law, code of law'. The *kanun* of northern Albania regulated virtually every aspect of life in the mountains and was strictly adhered to. Even today it is largely respected, despite the presence and force of 'government laws'. The best known variants of this code were the *Kanun* of Lekë Dukagjini that was observed among the tribes north of the Drin River; the *Kanun* of Scanderbeg, also known as the *Kanun* of Arbëria, that was observed among the tribes south of the Drin, including Mirdita; and the *Kanun* of Dibra in the eastern Dibra region.

kapedan

'captain, prince'. Standard Alb. *kapedan*, def. *kapedani* 'commander of a military unit, brave person'. The *kapedan* was the title given to the hereditary leader of the Mirdita region. The term, which is also spelled *kapidan*, is related to the English word 'captain', but it was usual in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to speak of the 'prince' of Mirdita.

katun

'village, settlement, pastoral community'. The term *katun* originally referred to a band of warriors or to a community of shepherds that formed the early nucleus of a tribe. Standard Alb. *katund*, def. *katundi*, is now synonymous with Alb. *fshat*, def. *fshati* 'village'.

kry

'chieftain'. The *kry*, plur. *krenë*, *krena*, standard Albanian *krye*, plur. *krerë*, meaning 'head, headman', was usually the assistant of the *bajraktar* (q.v.)

in the tribe. He often represented one of the *vllazni* (q.v.) of which the tribe was composed. The decisions of the chieftains in a tribal assembly had the force of law.

kryeplak

‘chief elder’. Standard Alb. *kryeplak*, def. *kryeplaku* ‘headman’. The *kryeplak* was the headman or village elder of a settlement. The term derives from Albanian *krye* ‘head’ and *plak* ‘elder, old man’.

kulla

‘stone tower’. Standard Alb. *kullë*, def. *kulla* ‘tower’. A *kulla* was a multi-storied stone dwelling designed to house and defend an extended family and its livestock. Many of these architecturally notable ‘stone towers’ still exist in northern Albania and Kosovo, and some are still inhabited. The word is related to Turkish *kule* ‘tower, turret’.

kuvend

‘assembly, tribal assembly’. Standard Alb. *kuvend*, def. *kuvendi* ‘conversation, assembly, parliament’. The word derives from Latin *conventus* ‘gathering, assembly’. Tribal assemblies were attended either by one man per household or by the tribal chieftains (*krena*).

lekë

‘highlander, inhabitant of the northern mountains’. Alb. *lekë*, def. *leka* is related to the personal name *Lekë* which is the short form for Alexander. It may derive from the mediaeval ruler Lekë Dukagjini (1410–81) or from Scanderbeg (1405–68), whose name is composed of ‘Alexander’ (Turkish *Iskander*) and ‘bey’. The term usually refers to highlanders living north of the Drin, their land sometimes being called *Leknia*.

malësor

‘inhabitant of the northern Albanian Alps, highlander’. This term, standard Alb. *malësor*, def. *malësori* ‘highlander’, stems from standard

Alb. *malësi*, def. *malësia* 'the northern Albanian Alps, the Albanian Highlands', which is the collective form of the noun *mal* 'mountain'. The word was once more common in English in the Italian plural form *malissori*.

mëhalla

'neighbourhood, hamlet, subdivision of a village'. Standard Alb. *mëhallë*, def. *mëhalla* 'neighbourhood'. The word is derived from Turkish *mahalle* 'neighbourhood'.

nahiye

'sub-district', a local administrative division of the Ottoman Empire. The *nahiye* was the sub-division of a *kaza*, which in turn was the sub-division of a *sanjak* (q.v.).

plak

'elder', Standard Alb. *plak*, def. *plaku*, plur. *pleq*, 'old man, elder'. A *plak* was the head of a brotherhood or village.

pleqni

'council of elders'. Gheg Alb. *pleqni*, def. *pleqnia*, standard Alb. *pleqëri*, def. *pleqëria* 'old age, old people, council of elders'.

sanjak

An administrative division of the Ottoman Empire. From Turkish *sancaq*. The original Sanjak of Albania (*Sancaq-i-Arnavid*) was created in 1385 and lasted until 1466 when it was divided up between the sanjaks of Vlora (Avlona) and Elbasan.

sanjakbey

The governor or commander of a *sanjak* (q.v.).

serai

‘mansion, manor, palace’, in particular of a ruling family of beys (q.v.). The term derives from Turkish *saray* ‘palace, mansion, government house’.

shpi

‘house, household’. Gheg Alb. *shpi*, def. *shpia*, standard Alb. *shtëpi*, def. *shtëpia* ‘house’. This was the basic unit of northern Albanian society. The sons of the head of the household traditionally continued to live under one roof with their parents, even after marriage. This led to an ‘extended family’ unit. In Kosovo, sons still often build their homes next to that of their parents, thus creating a compound of two or three homes traditionally surrounded by high walls that formed one single residential and economic unit. Income and the means of production were administered jointly within the family. This system had its equivalent among the southern Slavs in the *zadruga*. Such extended family units could be large. Margaret Hasluck noted a family with 95 members in Zdrajsh in Librazhd in 1923, and another one in Shala with 70 members.

Tosk

‘southern Albanian’. The term Tosk, standard Alb. *toskë*, def. *toska*, refers to the southern Albanians, i.e. all Albanians living south of the Shkumbin River and speaking Tosk dialects. The territory of the Tosks is poetically referred to as Toskëria. The northern Albanians are called Ghegs (q.v.).

vali

The governor of a *vilayet* (q.v.) of the Ottoman Empire.

vilayet

A province of the Ottoman Empire following the administrative reforms of 1864.

virgjinesha

‘sworn virgin’, Gheg Alb. *virgjinesbë*, def. *virgjinesha*, standard Alb. *virgjëresbë*, def. *virgjëresha* ‘virgin’. A *virgjinesha* was a girl in northern Albania who took on the male role in society and was accepted by her village and tribe as a man. Many such ‘sworn virgins’ still exist.

vllazni

‘brotherhood, fraternity’. Gheg Alb. *vllazni*, def. *vllaznia*, or *vëllazni*, def. *vëllaznia*, standard Alb. *vëllezëri*, def. *vëllezëria* ‘brotherhood’. A *vllazni* is a social unit composed of the sons (*bise*) of several families. They are often united by marriage and live as a single economic unit, sharing pastureland and defending one another’s interests in times of feuding. The *vllazni* can be seen more simply as an extended family unit. Several *vllazni* make up a *bajrak* (q.v.).

voyvoda

‘chief of a tribe’. Initially, in the pre-Ottoman period, the *voyvoda* or *voyvode* was the leader of a tribe. In order to weaken resistance to Ottoman rule, the Turks gradually replaced the office of the *voyvoda* with that of the *bajraktar* (q.v.). In some tribes, both titles were maintained, and often, the *voyvoda* of the tribe gained the upper hand over the *bajraktar* who was demoted to defence functions only.

zaptieh

An Ottoman policeman or guard.

NOTES

Introduction

1. I. Whitaker 1968, p. 254.
2. Also spelled *Geg*. The 'h' is often added in English, i.e. *Gbeg*, to show that the word is pronounced with a hard 'g' sound.
3. K. Steinmetz 1904, p. 40.
4. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 210.
5. F. Seiner 1922, p. 104.
6. One can also speak of Albanian 'clans' instead of 'tribes'. We regard these two terms as largely synonymous and interchangeable here in the Balkan context.
7. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 271.
8. F. Seiner 1922, p. 102.

Chapter 1 The Tribes of the Northern Albanian Alps (*Malësia e Madhe*)

1. M. Gökbilgin 1956, p. 273.
2. S. Pulaha 1974.
3. E. Armao 1933, p. 117.
4. R. Elsie (ed.) 2003, p. 155, also at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts/1000-1799/AH1614.html>.
5. J. Müller 1844, p. 13. Müller actually gives 42,000 with one zero too many.
6. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
7. E. Wiet 1868, p. 35.
8. F. Seiner 1922, p. 108.
9. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 86.

10. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
11. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 83–4.
12. F. Nopcsa 1910, pp. 57–8.
13. J. G. von Hahn 1867, p. 34. In the late Ottoman Empire, one *oka* was equivalent to about 1.3 kilos.
14. F. Nopcsa 1910, pp. 60–1.
15. J. G. von Hahn 1868, p. 126.
16. N. Malcolm 2000–2001, p. 149.
17. F. Lippich in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 83.
18. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 210.
19. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 22.
20. H. Hecquard 1858, pp. 178–84.
21. Possibly Maja e Kashticës.
22. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 211.
23. J. G. von Hahn 1854, vol. 1, pp. 183–5.
24. P. Bartl 1978, p. 125.
25. K. Luka 1980, pp. 219–52; N. Malcolm, 2000–1, p. 152.
26. N. Malcolm 2000–1, p. 155.
27. Ibid.
28. S. Pulaha (ed.) 1978, pp. 69–70.
29. L. Soranzo, 1600, pp. 178–9 ‘*Questi sono li Piperi, Cucci, Clementi, Bellopauligi, & altri nel paese della Plaua: trà quali vi sono molti Albanesi, che vivono alla Romana. E questi sono quelli, che per hauer sito forte, & esser di natura ferocissimi, non ancora si son lasciati ben soggiogare dall’armi del Turco.*’ Translated by Noel Malcolm in: N. Malcolm 2000–1, pp. 153–4.
30. N. Malcolm 2000–1, p. 154.
31. R. Elsie 2003, pp. 157–8, also at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1614.html>.
32. I. Zamputi (ed.) 1963, vol. 1, pp. 276–8.
33. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 212–3.
34. Frang Bardhi (1606–43), known in Latin as Franciscus Blancus and in Italian as Francesco Bianchi, was an early Albanian church figure of note. He is remembered, in particular, as the author of the first Albanian dictionary, the *Dictionarium latino-epiroticum*, Rome 1635.
35. I. Zamputi (ed.) 1965, vol. 2, p. 160.
36. J. Tomić (ed.) 1905, pp. 56–7; N. Malcolm 2000–1, p. 157.
37. R. Dankoff & S. Kim 2011, p. 165.
38. N. Malcolm 2000–1, p. 159.
39. Ibid., p. 160.
40. Ibid.
41. Vincentius Zmajevich (1670–1745), also written Vinzenz Zmajević, from Perast in the Bay of Kotor, was the Archbishop of Bar [Antivari], Administrator of the Diocese of Budva and Apostolic Visitor in Serbia,

- Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria from 1701 to 1713. He did much to improve the lot of the oppressed Albanian Catholics, and in particular to assist the starving Kelmendi tribe on their return to Kelmendi land from 1707.
42. P. Bartl 1978, p. 133.
 43. M. Jačov (ed.) 1983, p. 246.
 44. Friedrich Heinrich Reichsgraf von Seckendorff (1673–1762), was a Franconian field marshal and diplomat in the service of the Hapsburg monarchy.
 45. M. Kostić 1930, pp. 217–19; P. Bartl 1978, p. 134.
 46. M. Kostić 1930, p. 222; P. Bartl 1978 p. 134.
 47. L. von Thallóczy 1916, p. 314.
 48. Entry by Julius Löbe (1805–1900) of Rasephas, suburb of Altenburg in Thuringia, in *Encyclopädisches Wörterbuch der Wissenschaften, Künste und Gewerbe* (Altenburg 1824, 3rd edn Altenburg 1840): ‘1737 waren sie mit gegen die Türken gezogen, wurden aber in Walliewo fast alle niedergehauen. Von den Geretteten gingen 300 mit ihren Familien nach Belgrad und von da, von einem ihrer Priester Suno geführt, nach Syrmien, wo sie in der Gegend von Mitrowitz die Dörfer Herkofze und Nikinze an der Save anlegten, und in 6 Familien getheilt tapfre Grenzwächter waren[...] Die Zurückgebliebenen wurden 1738 von den Türken überfallen und ihr Hauptsitz Rudnik erobert.’
 49. M. Kostić 1930, p. 232; P. Bartl 1978, p. 134.
 50. K. von Windisch 1782, p. 82.
 51. L. von Thallóczy 1916, p. 321.
 52. Dh. Shuteriqi 1955, p. 181; P. Bartl 1978, p. 135.
 53. G. Stanojević 1962, pp. 395–6; P. Bartl 1978, p. 137.
 54. F. Nopcsa 2014, pp. 15–16.
 55. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
 56. *scudo*, pl. *scudi*, a type of coin used primarily in Italy until the nineteenth century.
 57. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
 58. E. Armao 1933, p. 134.
 59. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 85.
 60. L. Lucaj 2001, p. 56.
 61. E. J. Dillon 1914, p. 8.
 62. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 19.
 63. Turkish: ‘welcome’.
 64. F. Nopcsa 2014, pp. 27–31.
 65. *The New York Times*, 21 May 1911.
 66. R. Elsie (ed.) 2003, p. 155, also at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1614.html>.
 67. J. Müller 1844, p. 13. Müller actually gives 15,000 with one zero too many.
 68. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.

69. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 161.
70. E. Wiet 1868, p. 35.
71. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 67.
72. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 85.
73. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
74. J. G. von Hahn 1854, vol. 1, pp. 185–8.
75. H. Hecquard, 1858, p. 157.
76. L. Freundlich 2012, p. 88.
77. M. E. Durham, 1928, pp. 20–1.
78. L. Lucaj 2001, p. 24.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 26–7.
80. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
81. E. Wiet 1868, p. 36.
82. See the section on the Hoti tribe for the legendary origin of these quarrels.
83. L. Lucaj 2001, pp. 29–38.
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 32–3.
85. M. Miljanov 1967, vol. 2, pp. 13–17.
86. L. Lucaj 2001, pp. 53–4.
87. M. E. Durham 1914, pp. 43–5, 52.
88. The Kastrati tribe is not to be confused with the unrelated Kastrioti tribe of Upper Dibra who occupy the left (eastern) bank of the Black Drin.
89. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 85.
90. R. Elsie (ed.) 2003, p. 155, also at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1614.html>.
91. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
92. J. Müller 1844, p. 13. Müller actually gives 28,000 with one zero too many.
93. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
94. E. Wiet 1868, p. 35.
95. F. Seiner 1922, p. 110.
96. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 162.
97. This is the version of the legend recounted by D. Kurti 2010, pp. 25–6.
98. J. G. von Hahn 1854, vol. 1, pp. 188–92.
99. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 217–21.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
101. L. Mihačević 1913, pp. 103–4; 2006, p. 19.
102. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 41–4.
103. F. Seiner 1922, p. 108.
104. K. Steinmetz 1905, pp. 4–5.
105. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 216.

106. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 22. Saint Charles (Borromeo, 1538–1610), a reformer of the Council of Trent, is, however, a highly unlikely figure for a patron saint in Albania.
107. R. Elsie (ed.) 2003, pp. 148, 155, also at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1614.html>.
108. J. Müller 1844, p. 13. Müller actually gives 19,000 with one zero too many.
109. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
110. F. Seiner 1922, p. 112.
111. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 199.
112. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 22.
113. C. Coon 1950, p. 45.
114. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 227.
115. F. Nopcsa, *Beiträge...* 1912, pp. 249–50.
116. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 172.
117. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 199.
118. F. Nopcsa 1932, p. 364.
119. K. Steinmetz 1905, p. 3.
120. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 45–52.
121. From the volume: Azem Shkreli, *Blood of the Quill, Selected Poetry from Kosova*, edited and translated by Robert Elsie and Janice Mathie-Heck (Copenhagen & Los Angeles 2008), pp. 95–6.
122. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 23.
123. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>. The ruins of a Church of Saint Nicholas, known simply as Kisha e Lohes, could be seen in the 1930s in Kozaj. Cf. E. Armao 1933, pp. 78, 137.
124. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 103; M. E. Durham 1928, p. 23.
125. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
126. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 158.
127. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 164.
128. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 23.
129. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 227.
130. This Reçi is not to be confused with a Reçi tribe in the District of Dibra, commonly known as Reç Dardha.
131. R. Elsie (ed.) 2003, p. 147, also at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1614.html>.
132. E. Armao 1933, pp. 96–97.
133. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
134. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 158.
135. Ibid.
136. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 23.
137. The magnificent forest of monumental chestnut trees was still there in 2014 [R.E.].

138. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 103–4.
139. E. Armao 1933, p. 98.
140. K. Jireček 1916, p. 95.
141. R. Elsie (ed.) 2003, p. 146, also at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1614.html>.
142. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
143. H. Hecquard 1858, pp. 149–50.
144. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 23.
145. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
146. N. Malcolm 2013, p. 458.
147. H. Hecquard, 1858, pp. 150–1. In fact, Bolizza does refer to them as *Rivoli*, as mentioned above, see: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1614.html>.
148. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 171.
149. K. Hassert 1898, pp. 365–6.
150. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 108.

Chapter 2 The Tribes of The Pulat Region

1. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 88, 2006, p. 81.
2. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
3. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 144.
4. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
5. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 114; M. E. Durham 1928, p. 25.
6. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 241–2.
7. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 114, 116, 117.
8. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
9. E. Armao 1933, p. 118.
10. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 144.
11. F. Seiner 1922, p. 112.
12. Rr. Zojzi 1944, p. 63.
13. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 110–11.
14. Livy 44, 31.
15. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 242.
16. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 87; 2006, p. 80.
17. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
18. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 144.
19. F. Seiner 1922, p. 110.
20. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 25.

21. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 242–3.
22. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 159–60.
23. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 29.
24. F. Nopcsa 1932, p. 304.
25. N. Malcolm 2013, p. 457.
26. F. Seiner 1922, p. 112.
27. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 243.
28. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 29.
29. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 155–6.
30. M. E. Durham 1914, pp. 92–4.
31. L. Thallóczy et al. 1913, vol. 1, no. 50, p. 11.
32. L. Thallóczy et al. 1913, vol. 1, no. 63, p. 17.
33. S. Ljubić 1868–91, vol. 7, pp. 282, 286, 287, 289, 291, 292.
34. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 28.
35. H. Hecquard 1858, pp. 137, 141.
36. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
37. *Statuta et ordinationes capituli ecclesiae cathedralis drivastiensis*, preserved in Copenhagen in the Danish Royal Library. cf. V. Novak and M. Šufflay 1927.
38. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 28.
39. M. Barleti 2012, pp. 153–4. Translated by David Hosaflook.
40. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 246–7.

Chapter 3 The Tribes of the Dukagjin Region

1. E. Armao 1933, p. 101.
2. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 88.
3. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
4. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 143.
5. K. Steinmetz 1904, p. 62.
6. F. Seiner 1922, p. 112.
7. J. G. von Hahn 1868, p. 127.
8. S. Pulaha, *Mbi gjallerimin...* 1975, p. 130.
9. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 228.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
11. J. V. Ivanova 1973, p. 32; D. Kurti 2010, p. 24.
12. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 172.
13. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 26.
14. K. Hassert 1897, pp. 538–42.
15. K. Steinmetz 1905, pp. 11–13.
16. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 118, 119–20, 123–4, 130–1.
17. F. Nopcsa 2014, p. 102.
18. M. E. Durham 1914, pp. 35–6.

19. A linguist parallel can be seen in the Albanian toponym of Shopël in Puka that is derived from Saint Paul (Alb. Shën Pal, Ital. San Paolo).
20. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 215.
21. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 88; 2006, p. 81.
22. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
23. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
24. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 143.
25. F. Seiner 1922, p. 112.
26. B. Palaj 1943, p. 69.
27. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 151–2.
28. Ibid., p. 161.
29. F. Seiner 1922, p. 112.
30. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 237–8.
31. J. A. Degrand 1901, pp. 249–50.
32. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 160–1.
33. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 245.
34. M. E. Durham 1928, pp. 28–9.
35. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 240.
36. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 87; 2006, p. 80.
37. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 165–6.
38. F. Seiner 1922, p. 112.
39. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 240.
40. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 165.
41. Ibid., pp. 165–7.
42. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 88; 2006, p. 81.
43. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
44. F. Seiner 1922, p. 112.
45. F. Nopcsa, *Beitrag*... 1907. English version at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts20_1/AH1907.html.
46. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 192; M. E. Durham 1928, p. 26.
47. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 237.
48. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 26.
49. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 192–3.
50. J. G. von Hahn 1867, p. 58.

Chapter 4 The Tribes of the Gjakova Highlands (*Malësia e Gjakovës*)

1. L. Mihačević 1913, pp. 87–8, 2006, p. 81.
2. P. Bartl 2013, p. 306.

3. F. Nopcsa 1932, p. 304.
4. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 195.
5. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
6. A settlement of this name no longer exists.
7. K. Steinmetz 1904, pp. 15–16; F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 234–5. cf. also S. Pulaha, *Mbi gjallërimin...* 1975, p. 131.
8. There is a settlement called Vajush that is located six kilometres east of Koplik.
9. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 169.
10. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 234.
11. Rr. Zojzi 1993, p. 116.
12. K. Steinmetz 1905, pp. 19, 37.
13. K. Steinmetz 1904, p. 16.
14. Ibid., p. 20.
15. Ibid., p. 27.
16. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 195–6.
17. F. Nopcsa 2013.
18. J. G. von Hahn 1867, p. 68.
19. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 169.
20. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 87.
21. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 242.
22. J. G. von Hahn 1867, p. 75.
23. K. Steinmetz 1904, p. 57.
24. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
25. S. Pulaha, *Mbi gjallërimin...* 1975, p. 131.
26. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 244–245.
27. Ibid., p. 301.
28. K. Steinmetz 1904, pp. 25, 26.
29. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 68.
30. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
31. J. G. von Hahn 1867, p. 75.
32. Ibid.
33. J. G. von Hahn 1868, p. 126.
34. F. Seiner 1922, p. 110.
35. I. Malaj 2007, p. 17.
36. L. Mihačević 1913, pp. 99–100; 2006, pp. 15–16.
37. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
38. J. G. von Hahn 1867, p. 75.
39. J. G. von Hahn 1868, p. 126.
40. Naval Intelligence Division 1945 (ed.), p. 159.
41. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
42. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 237.
43. I. Malaj 2007, p. 16.

44. I. Malaj 2007, p. 16.
45. Ibid., p. 1.
46. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
47. J. G. von Hahn 1868, p. 126.
48. A. Kaloshi 2004, pp. 225–46.
49. I. Malaj 2007, p. 17.
50. K. Steinmetz 1904, pp. 27–8.

Chapter 5 The Tribes of the Puka Region

1. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
2. F. Nopcsa, *Beiträge...* 1912, p. 248.
3. J. G. von Hahn 1867, pp. 45, 49.
4. S. Pulaha 1988, p. 290.
5. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
6. P. Bartl 2013, p. 302.
7. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 218.
8. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 234–5.
9. Xh. Meçi 2008, p. 29.
10. K. Steinmetz 1904, p. 49 fn.
11. Xh. Meçi 2008, p. 33.
12. E. Armao 1933, p. 137.
13. Ibid., p. 68.
14. F. Seiner 1922, p. 110.
15. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 250.
16. Xh. Meçi 2008, p. 95.
17. I. S. Jastrebov 1904.
18. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 255–6.
19. Ibid., p. 246.
20. F. Nopcsa 1932, p. 304.
21. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
22. This region of Karadag, meaning ‘black mountains’ is called Mal i Zi i Shkupit in Albanian, and Skopska Crna Gora in BCS. It is not to be confused with Montenegro or with the tribal region of Mali i zi.
23. J. G. von Hahn 1868, p. 127.
24. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
25. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 156.
26. F. Nopcsa, *Beiträge...* 1912, p. 248.
27. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 27.
28. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 247.
29. Ibid., pp. 246–7.
30. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 156.

31. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
32. J. G. von Hahn 1867, p. 75.
33. F. Seiner 1922, pp. 109, 110.
34. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 248–9.
35. P. Bartl 2013, p. 303.
36. A. Boué 1854, p. 328.
37. L. Mihačević 1913, pp. 96–7.
38. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 235–7.
39. Sh. Hoxha, *Malziu* 2013, p. 264.
40. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
41. Sh. Hoxha, *Malziu* 2013, pp. 28–30.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
43. J. G. von Hahn 1867, p. 54.
44. Sh. Hoxha, *Malziu* 2013, p. 172.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
46. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 303–4.

Chapter 6 The Tribes of the Lezha Highlands (*Malësia e Lezhës*)

1. E. Wiet 1866; English version at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_2/AH1866.html.
2. K. Steinmetz 1908, p. 5.
3. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
4. E. Wiet 1866; English version at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_2/AH1866.html.
5. K. Steinmetz 1908, p. 5.
6. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 84.
7. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
8. K. Steinmetz 1908, p. 5.
9. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 329–31.
10. E. Wiet 1866; English version at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_2/AH1866.html.
11. K. Steinmetz 1908, p. 5.
12. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
13. Also spelled Velja. The tribe is sometimes called the Rreja e Velës.
14. G. Hoxha et al. 2007, pp. 106–9.
15. E. Wiet 1866; English version at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_2/AH1866.html.
16. K. Steinmetz 1908, p. 5.
17. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.

Chapter 7 The Tribes of the Kruja Highlands (*Malësia e Krujës*)

1. M. Šufflay 1916, p. 273.
2. F. Seiner 1922, p. 110.
3. Ibid., p. 111.
4. Ibid., p. 109.
5. J. G. von Hahn 1867, pp. 15–16.

Chapter 8 The Tribes of the Mirdita Region

1. S. Pulaha 1988, p. 291.
2. This often cited and rather insipid folk etymology speaks of three brothers as the ancestors of Shala, Shoshi and Mirdita. The first brother had a saddle (Alb. *shalë*), the second brother had a sieve (Alb. *shosbë*) and the third brother had nothing at all so he said 'hello' (Alb. *mirëdita*).
3. H. Hecquard 1858, pp. 224–5.
4. E. Wiet 1866.
5. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
6. K. Steinmetz 1904, p. 39.
7. F. Seiner 1922, p. 108.
8. M. E. Durham 1920, pp. 29–30.
9. H. Tozer 1869, pp. 287–8, 307–8.
10. K. Hassert 1897, p. 534.
11. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 231 ('Ils sont, du reste, les plus grands pillards du monde').
12. J. A. Degrand 1901, pp. 149–50.
13. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 323.
14. K. Steinmetz 1908, p. 2.
15. S. Pulaha, *Mbi gjallërimin...* 1975, p. 133.
16. M. E. Durham 1920, p. 30.
17. J. V. Ivanova 1973, p. 32.
18. Ibid., p. 71; P. Bartl 1978, p. 31.
19. S. Naçi 1964, p. 261.
20. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 235; S. Naçi 1964, pp. 72, 118, 261, 276; P. Bartl 1978, p. 32.
21. G. L. Arš 1963, p. 246; P. Bartl 1978, p. 32.
22. H. Hecquard 1858, pp. 236–8. Prenk Lleshi can be translated at Prince Alexander.
23. F. Pouqueville 1820, vol 1, p. 545.
24. S. Naçi 1964, p. 74: 'Noi altezza vessir Mustafa Pascià di Scutari et Albania... la casa di Giovanne Marcu è statto conosciuto e stimatto sempre primiera in tutta la Miredita... è statto conosciuto dalli miei antenati, miei zij vesiratti di nostro divano...'

25. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 238; P. Bartl 1978, p. 33.
26. H. Hecquard 1858, pp. 238–41; H. Tozer 1869, pp. 303–6; P. Bartl 1978, pp. 33–4.
27. D. De Gubernatis 1688, p. 408.
28. P. Bartl 1978, p. 38.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 40–6.
30. M. E. Durham 1909, p. 324.
31. E. F. Knight 1880, pp. 123–4.
32. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 340–4.
33. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 29.
34. W. Peinsipp 1985, p. 77.
35. H. Tozer 1869, pp. 291, 292–3.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 309–10, 318–19.
37. J. A. Degrand 1901, p. 159.
38. Dibrri is not to be confused with Dibra, a region on the Albanian–Macedonian border.
39. S. Pulaha 1988, p. 290.
40. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
41. G. Hoxha 2007, pp. 118–21.
42. F. Seiner 1922, p. 108.
43. F. Nopcsa 1932, p. 304.
44. M. E. Durham 1905, pp. 370–4, 383–4.
45. English translation at: <http://www.albanianhistory.net/en/texts1000–1799/AH1671.html>.
46. F. Seiner 1922, p. 108.
47. B. Palaj 1943, p. 69.
48. F. Seiner 1922, p. 108.
49. B. Palaj 1943, p. 69.
50. R. Elsie (ed.) 2003, pp. 117–19.
51. F. Seiner 1922, p. 108.
52. H. Hecquard 1858, p. 221.
53. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 159.
54. K. Steinmetz 1904, p. 29.
55. E. Wiet, 1868, p. 30.
56. P. Bartl 2013, p. 303.
57. F. Seiner 1922, p. 108.
58. B. Palaj 1943, p. 69.
59. E. Wiet 1866.
60. H. Tozer 1869, pp. 300–1.
61. K. Hassert 1897, pp. 534–5.
62. M. E. Durham 1905, pp. 376–7.
63. K. Steinmetz 1908, pp. 31–2.
64. F. Seiner 1922, p. 110.

65. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 168.
66. K. Steinmetz 1908, pp. 32–3.
67. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 325–6.
68. K. Steinmetz 1908, p. 62.
69. F. Seiner 1922, p. 112.
70. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 171.
71. K. Steinmetz 1908, pp. 63–4.

Chapter 9 The Tribes of the Mat Region

1. Also formerly known as Beshkashi and Bishkashi.
2. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
3. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 156.
4. P. Bartl 2011, pp. 274, 318; P. Bartl 2013, pp. 301–2.
5. J. G. von Hahn 1867, p. 27.
6. Ibid., p. 28.
7. K. Steinmetz 1908, pp. 11–15.
8. Also referred to as Matja.
9. Ö. Barkan 1964, p. 77.
10. F. Seiner 1922, p. 108.
11. G. Stadtmüller 1966. English summary at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts20_2/AH1936.html.
12. J. G. von Hahn 1867, p. 26.

Chapter 10 The Tribes of the Upper Drin Basin

1. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 161.
2. M. Filipović 1958; M. Tirta 2013, p. 275.
3. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 168.
4. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 237–9.
5. M. E. Durham, 1927, p. 32.
6. I. Jastrebov 1904.
7. Sh. Hoxha, *E drejta dokesore në Lumë* 2013, p. 56.
8. F. Seiner 1922, pp. 110–11.
9. Sh. Hoxha, *E drejta dokesore në Lumë* 2013, p. 53.
10. M. E. Durham 1928, p. 31.
11. British National Archives, Foreign Office document FO 424/243 4216, no. 340, reproduced in G. Rizaj 2011, p. 509.
12. M. D. Skopianski 1919; English version at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts20_1/AH1913_4.html.
13. K. Hassert 1898, pp. 362–3.
14. K. Steinmetz 1904, p. 33.
15. L. Mihačević 1913, pp. 167–8.

16. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 170.
17. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 301–2.
18. G. Louis-Jaray 1913, pp. 92–8, 100–1.
19. F. Nopcsa 1929, p. 683.
20. L. Mihačević 1913, p. 90.
21. The small Camadolese community of Benedictine monks, founded by Saint Romuald, stems from the hermitage of Camadoli in the hills of Tuscany near Arezzo (Italy).
22. J. G. von Hahn 1867, p. 85.
23. K. Steinmetz 1908, pp. 50–1.
24. L. Mihačević 1913, pp. 117–18; 2006, p. 31.
25. N. Vasoyevich 1841. English translation at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19_1/AH1841_2.html.
26. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
27. K. Steinmetz 1908, pp. 44, 55.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
29. L. Mihačević 1913, pp. 115–16; 2006, pp. 29–30.
30. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 312–13.
31. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 156.
32. P. Bartl 2013, p. 305.
33. M. E. Durham 1909, pp. 302–8.
34. Dibra is not to be confused with the tribal region of Dibrri in Mirdita.
35. The Albanian-speaking town of Dibra, now in the Republic of Macedonia, is often referred to in Albanian as Dibra e Madhe (Great Dibra) and is known in Macedonian as Debar and in Turkish as Debre.
36. L. Thallóczy et al. 1913, vol. 1, no. 78, p. 26.
37. L. Thallóczy et al. 1913, vol. 1, no. 160, p. 50.
38. G. Valentini, vol. 1, p. 589; M. Šufflay 1924, p. 18.
39. M. D. Skopianski 1919; English version at: http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts20_1/AH1913_4.html.

Chapter 11 Minor Albanian Tribes

1. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 254–5.
2. E. Armao 1933, p. 41.
3. M. Galaty et al. 2013, p. 58.
4. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 157.
7. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
8. E. Armao 1933, p. 60.
9. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
10. *Ibid.*
11. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 252–3.

12. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
13. M. Galaty et al. 2013, p. 58.
14. E. Armao 1933, p. 72.
15. F. Seiner 1922, p. 109.
16. H. Hecquard 1858, pp. 151–2.
17. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, pp. 253–4.
18. F. Seiner 1922, p. 110.
19. Naval Intelligence Division (ed.) 1945, p. 163.
20. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
21. F. Nopcsa in: F. Baxhaku & K. Kaser (eds) 1996, p. 237.
22. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
23. This Reçi tribe is not to be confused with the Reçi tribe in the northern Albanian Alps (Malësia e Madhe), north of Shkodra.
24. F. Seiner 1922, p. 111.
25. Ibid., p. 112.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.

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